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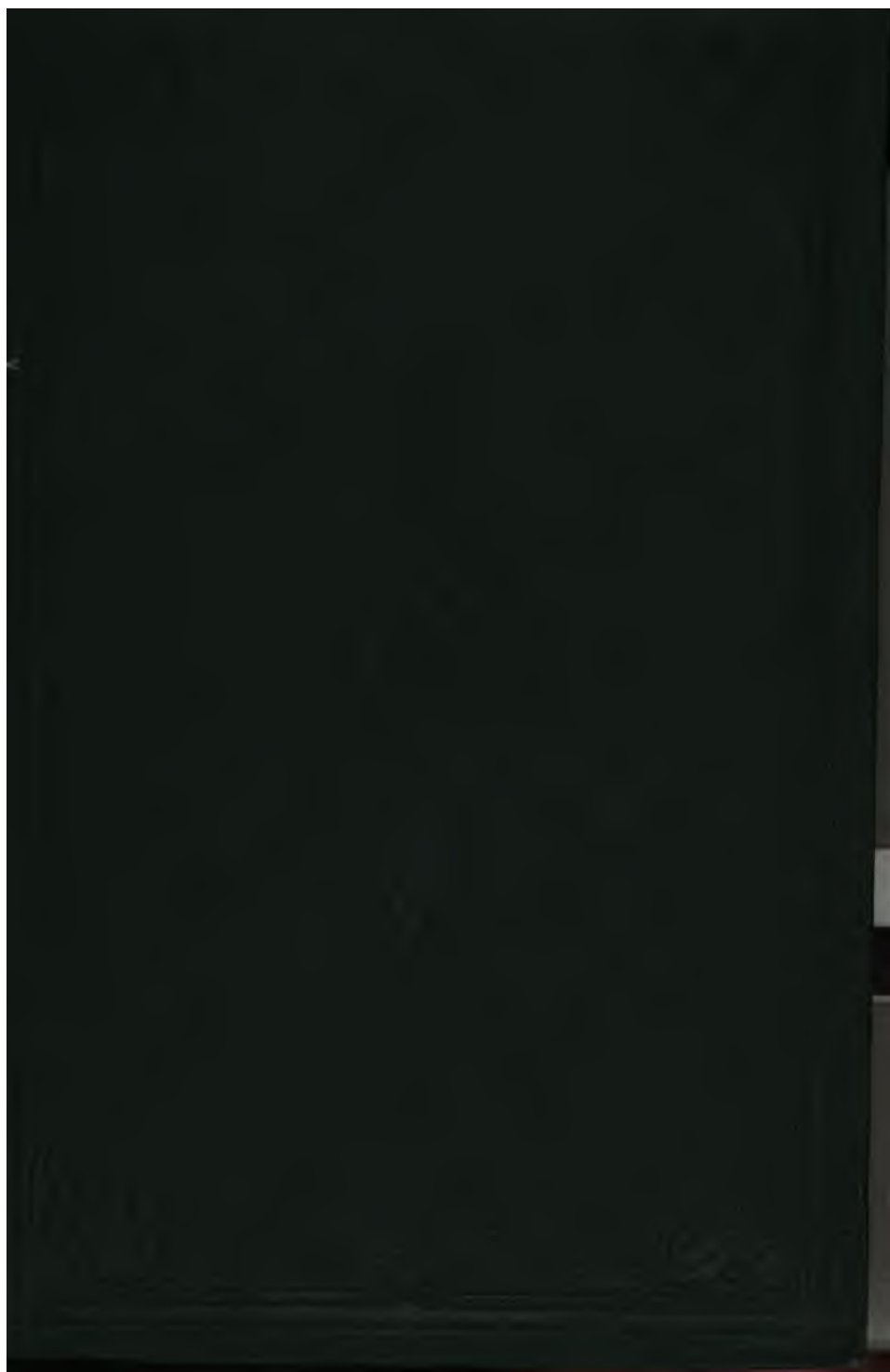
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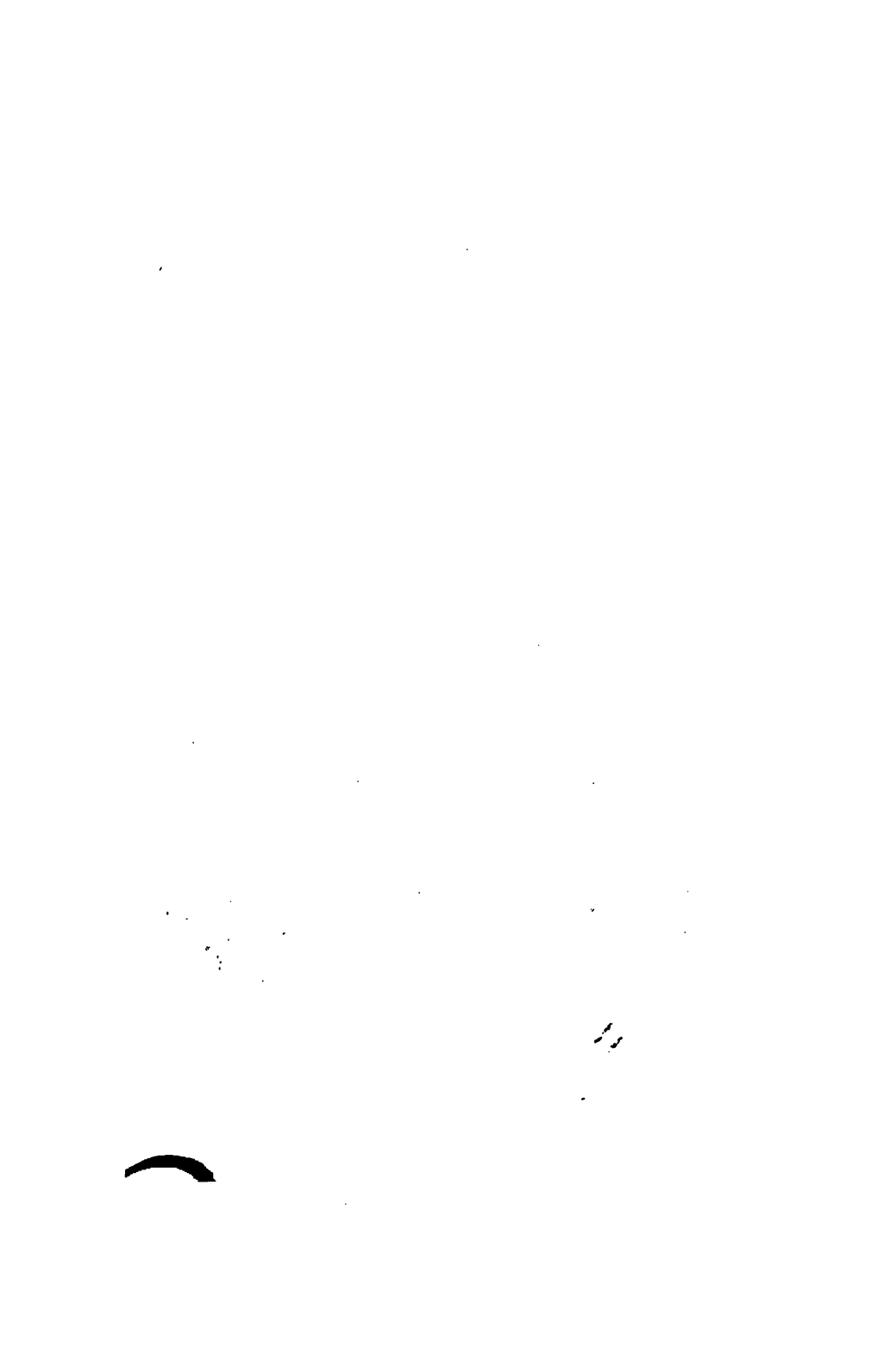
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MISS FORRESTER.



# MISS FORRESTER.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF "THE MORALS OF MAY FAIR," "CREEDS," "THE ORDEAL  
FOR WIVES," &c. &c.

"The leopard follows her nature as the lamb does, and acts after leopard law; she can neither help her beauty, nor her courage, nor her cruelty; nor a single spot on her shining coat; nor the conquering spirit which impels her; nor the shot which brings her down."—ESMOND.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1865.

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# MISS FORRESTER.

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## CHAPTER I.

“DIES, STARVED.”

“ANOTHER day—and I am here still. Great Heaven! how long—how long!”

And Honoria Forrester rose from her place beside the dying woman's bed, drew aside the curtain that muffled the light of the wan March morning from the chamber of death, and then, leaning her face impatiently against the window-pane, looked forth upon the street.

She knew every detail of that street well. For weeks past she had been looking at these same dingy London houses, at this same dingy pavement, at these same dingy passers-by. Whoever gets a habit of watching from his window

in London at one particular hour of the day will find, at the end of a week, that he knows a certain number of the men and women who habitually pass there, as well as he would do if he lived in a village and looked out, at a certain hour, upon a village street. At ten o'clock it was Miss Forrester's custom to stand, as she was doing this morning, wearied with her broken night, looking forward, only to another stagnant silent day, and taking note—but, absolutely without will or interest of her own—of that particular section of the London world which her window in this dull, old-fashioned corner house of Harley Street commanded.

The accustomed faces greeted her now. Only, the morning being more sullenly grey than even the majority of London mornings, they all of them looked somewhat more pinched, more careworn, more generally full of misery at having to go through another day, than usual. The ashen face of the cadaverous man who came to clean the lamps was blue with cold, and a wretched wisp of a comforter, twisted round his neck, added, rather than lessened, the starved effect of

the full evening suit (that had once been black), in which his morning duties were performed. The cheeks of the mild butcher's boy who, on warm mornings, would read desultory scraps of gory newspaper, and run his tray into the faces of the passers-by as he walked, were to-day mottled and raw-looking as a joint of his own beef. The street sweeper at the corner—with a club-foot more distorted than ever entered into the brain of mediæval artist to conceive—was alternately beating his arms across his chest with savage emphasis, and breathing fiercely upon his swollen, mittened hands. The professor, going to Number 9, hurried along as fast as his little French legs, and huge cloak that the cruel wind blew between them, would allow. Only the sweeps, who from adventitious circumstances must, outwardly at least, be beyond atmospheric influences, kept their usual countenance to-day; but even in their hoarse cry, fog and cold and misery were as palpably discernible to Honoria Forrester's intelligence as they were upon the faces of normally coloured men.

"This is life," she thought. "This is life,



such as common men and women lead in the common streets (I knew it, or very near to it, once), and by how much better are we off who look at them from within? Not much, I think. Is it a gift to be prized? By me, yes, for I know how to live; but by the every-day run of people, to a woman like this one who's dying, where is life's worth? What good would be done to her by keeping her from going? If one of these wretches in the street was sinking from his cold and pain into forgetfulness, which would be the mercy, to let him go, or to hold him back? Her life hasn't lacked food and shelter, certainly, but it has been a life of pain, of peevishness, of discontent, for years. Why seek to prolong it? Why, above all, when, as she told me yesterday, she believes herself to be going to a better place and better company than mine!"

And Miss Forrester walked back to the bedside, and, folding her arms across her chest, looked down, long and closely, upon her unconscious patient's face.

The epitome of life that shall one day be written on your face and mine, reader, was

plainly legible there. Hope, disappointment, pleasure, pain—all over ! All summed up on that lined and livid face, and the final balance evidently not upon the brighter side. Mrs. Forsyth had been a rich woman, a courted woman ; had known love once, perhaps ; had had a husband, and brothers and sisters, certainly ; and now she was dying of low fever ; under much the same condition as the poor Irish mason’s starved wife in the squalid court behind the mews : only with parsons to read to her, and physicians to prescribe for her, and with her hired companion, Miss Honoria Forrester, to succour her *in extremis*.

For more than a fortnight Miss Forrester had scarcely left Mrs. Forsyth’s side. She wanted no help, she said, in answer to the physician’s suggestion of a professional nurse. She had a constitution of adamant. Time enough to think of troubling the patient with a new face when she broke down. And, true to her resolution, she had nursed her alone ; often sitting up by night as well as by day, to the last. She was right. She had a constitution of adamant. She

could eat her meals heartily in the atmosphere of a sick-room, where the patient, as long as she retained consciousness at all, never suffered a window to be opened; could take snatches of sweet sound sleep between every call of the impatient querulous voice throughout the night. Sleep and digestion never forsook Honoria Forrester under any crisis of her life. Had they done so, she had probably been a better woman, so indissolubly connected is dyspepsia even with our sense of right and wrong. And as she went to the glass and began her morning toilette, at this moment, after three weeks of constant confinement, and the hardest of all physical and mental strain-nursing, she looked fresher, less worn than the majority of young women would look on the morning after a ball.

Strength was pre-eminently written, indeed, upon every line of her face and figure. She was of middle height, broad-chested, compactly knit. The bust short as compared to the length of limb; the arms full above the elbow, and finely cut and proportioned towards the wrist; the hands white and blue-veined, but shaped on

somewhat too masculine a mould for beauty. Women said her waist was coarse and her shoulders large. No man ever looked at Honoria Forrester's unwhaleboned, untrammelled figure without pronouncing it perfect. And her foot was a model: arched, small, and singularly full of character in its short elastic tread. As for her face, I cannot tell you exactly whether she was beautiful or not. If she was not, beauty is an unnecessary quality in the art of leading men's hearts captive; for, as with some pictures, you never tired of looking at Honoria Forrester's face, and every day you got to learn something that charmed you afresh, either in its features or expression. Catalogued, it was far from faultless: low forehead, square, massive-cut jaw; large mouth; unclassical nose; but flushed with life and vigorous health—I address myself here to men—you could not criticise. And she had a complexion of delicate pink and white, and perfect small square teeth, and firm red lips, and hair, not very profuse in quantity, but exquisitely fine, and yellow as fresh-spun silk. This hair was dressed, by processes only known to herself,

first in a soft cloud of tiny waves that almost reached her straight black eyebrows, and then drawn back from the temples in a retreating cunning mass from which one or two natural-looking ringlets (they were not curls) fell upon her neck.

Her eyes were common grey blue eyes, neither large nor small, but with an expression in their dilated pupils that by turns repulsed or fascinated you at will. I don't say it was the expression of an animal. The exclusively human prerogative of dissimulation was Honoria's by birthright; but still when you looked deep into the black iris of those unresting eyes, you did ask yourself what wild creature it was that you instinctively thought of. To all human tenderness, to all human weakness, they were blank. Indeed, about the whole of that supple, strong *physique*, with its unscathed nerves, its muscles and joints of steel, there was something directly corroborative of the opinion of those theorists who affirm that man's place in nature is not a god-like one.

She stood, as I said, with folded arms, looking down upon her unconscious patient's face. What

she read there must have been satisfactory, for, at the end of three or four minutes, her mouth relaxed into a smile, and with more of life than her movements had as yet showed this day, she walked across to the dressing-table at the other side of the room, and began her morning toilette.

It was elaborate even in its simplicity. In the room of a dying woman, and with only one elderly physician as her possible audience, Miss Forrester took an hour and a-half to dress. Her nature was not a complex one. She had a few indomitable instincts—to which she was as faithful, perhaps, as higher natures are to their principles—and one of these was the instinct of dress. Dress, not as an inferior artist understands the term; *id est*, silks, ribbons, and cashmeres; but dress in its most catholic and exhaustive meaning: the whole external machinery of the science of seduction. Every hair upon Miss Forrester's head, every inch of her skin, every thread of linen that she wore, received the same untiring scrupulous care at her hands. Long ago she had taken an ice-cold bath in the adjoining dressing-room. Her dress

was already completed, as far as the white, flowing wrapper that she would wear till noon, and still an hour's work was before her ; for her hair was still in pins, her eyebrows, her eyelashes, her complexion unfinished.

"What! this woman painted?" you say.  
"Then to me all her charms would have been without charm."

Wait! You say that because you have been used to connect the word "paint" with all manner of coarse and inartistic renovations; with women who strive to make up by artifice for the youth, or bloom, or strength of colouring they lack. Honoria Forrester's skin was delicate, her eyebrows dark, by nature. She was in the perfection of her first maturity still, and she was a thorough professional artist! Looking at her black-lashed eyes and scarlet lips and rose-leaf complexion through the thinnest possible veil out of doors, or, unveiled, in the broadest light any woman ever admits into a drawing-room, you could detect no trace whatever of artificial process on her face. Only as a master's hand puts the last touch that transfigures his picture from

painted canvas into life, she gloried in putting the last cunning touch that transformed her face from mere commonplace beauty into irresistible piquancy, and a freshness more natural than nature itself.

There are some professions and trades the practitioners of which hold no social rank by right of office. It is only when his porter is manufactured and exported by thousands of annual hogsheads, for example, that its maker commands a seat in Parliament or a place at county dinners. Such, I take it, is the case with women who paint their faces. Inordinate success alone confirms the patent of nobility upon a calling not honourable in itself. To this point Miss Forrester had attained, and she knew it; not unfrequently confessed to her more intimate allies that she did make up. "Was there harm in it? Was not one's first duty to be as little disagreeable to the world as one could?" And, is it needful to add, she looked down with orthodox professional contempt on the immoral quacks, the unqualified low practitioners in the handicraft whereof she herself was an adept.



As in all other branches of art, extraordinary proficiency in the practice of enameling the human skin, or blackening the human eyes, pre-eminently demands these two qualities : inborn genius and, the handmaid of all genius, patience. This last quality was also among the three or four simple elements of Honoria's nature. Look at her now. Look at her carefully releasing lock after lock from those dozens of pins ; look at the tedious adjustment of every line, of every hair, in that elaborate *coiffure*, that no one but herself and one old doctor shall see, and say if you would like to have her against you in any juncture of life in which the possibility of your ruin was to be attained by her perseverance ? As well seek to baulk the spider from re-mending his broken web as to turn this woman aside in any pursuit—love, or war, or ambition—to which she had once resolutely set her mind.

When her toilette was finished, she set the table fastidiously in order with her own hands ; she hated the attendance of servants at all times, hated it especially in her present capacity as Mrs. Forsyth's nurse ; took a book of hand-

somely bound devotions, "St. Thomas à Kempis," into her hand, rang the bell, and then seated herself demurely by the patient's side. In ten minutes a woman servant entered with a tray containing Miss Forrester's breakfast — claret, a patty, a morsel of cold pheasant, a small bottle of liqueur, and some grapes. Miss Forrester had been brought up abroad, and always breakfasted thus. What constitutes the breakfast of Englishwomen, a cup of coffee and a roll, being taken by her before rising, at seven.

The servant-girl looked at her mistress's dying face, and started. "Lord, Miss!" she ejaculated, turning to Honoria, "isn't missus much worse since last night? She looks ——"

"Hush!" interrupted Miss Forrester quickly, and putting her finger on her lips; "Mrs. Forsyth has been sleeping for the last two hours. Everything may depend on her not being disturbed. Put the breakfast down quietly, and as you go out shut the door without noise. When I want you again I will ring."

"And you think her no worse, Miss?" said the girl, lingering.

"I think her no better," answered Honoria, but in a tone that utterly discouraged further inquiry. "When the doctor comes we shall know more. I have everything I require, thank you. Be sure you shut the door quietly."

The girl left the room, after another long look at the unconscious white face upon the pillow, and went down to promulgate abroad in the household her decided opinion that her mistress was dying, and that Miss knew it too. And for all she'd been so good sitting up at night, which she, Mary couldn't deny, she showed no more feeling than flint at the approach of death. "And have got her yellow hair a-frizzed and a-Frenchified, if you'll believe me, Mister Thomas, and sitting as cool as you please with her breakfast—that lovely pheasant that has never gone a-nigh poor missus's lips—drawn up comfortably before the fire; and missus's best new Turkey slippers on her feet. So much for your beauties and your foreigners, Mr. Thomas!" Mr. Thomas had always upheld Miss Forrester's appearance, greatly to the embitterment and aggravation of all the female portion of the household. "If

missus had taken a quiet English young lady for companion instead of a stuck-up play actor like this one, things might have ended different."

The butler remarked that he did not see how an English companion would have altered the course of Mrs. Forsyth's illness. Miss Forrester, as Mary herself could not contradict, had set up with her like a daughter; and for her manner and consideration to all in the house he, Thomas, would back her against every English companion or governess he'd ever had anything to do with before.

"Hang her manners!" cried Mary, coarsely, "and her beauty, which I never see myself; and I do say, and cook says so too, that her yellow hair dragged down over her eyes is he-dious to behold, and all belonging to her! When poor missus is dead, and we're all out of place, Mr. Thomas, you mark my words if Miss hasn't feathered a pretty nest for herself, and been remembered in the will too. I hated her from the first minute I seed her, and if some people's fools enough to be taken in by her palaver and her foreign ways, I'm not. When I was a child,

my mother told me about Courvoysur," added Mary with savage animus; "him as murdered his master in his sleep; and I say, and have said, and I'll say till my dying day, the Lord keep those as have money to leave from having foreigners about 'em in sickness! I know my duty as a Christian, Mr. Thomas, and I accuse nobody; but I do say I don't believe missus's beef-tea has been given her regular."

Partly on principle, partly from natural distaste to her own sex, it was the rule of Miss Forrester's life to propitiate men only. A few exceptions it was of course forced upon her to make; and one of these had been Mrs. Forsyth, to whose minutest caprice or temper Honoria had been subservient during more than two years. The rule of her life was to ignore women altogether in the great struggle for existence. No plain woman, however hearty her inclination, can do this. A plain woman must have auxiliaries, in the onset, at least, of her attacks. A plain woman must, for appearances' sake, have female friends to fall back upon in times of desertion or neglect. But Honoria needed neither assistance

nor support. Her position she knew, ever since she was twelve years of, must be won alone—her hand against every woman, and every woman's hand against her. The alliances that strengthen others of her sex would have only weakened her. She knew, she said openly, that she did not get on with women, or they with her. She could not tell why; she could only tell that the fact was so—no doubt from some fault in her own character—and men must take her as she was. And all men, from dukes to footmen, seemed quite content to do so. And all men, when Honoria had once lifted her eyes to theirs, liked her in their hearts, and thought it the most natural thing possible that other women should be mortally jealous of her charms.

This rule of hers had been fully carried out in Mrs. Forsyth's household, and Honoria smiled in her consciousness of the fact, as Mary's suspicious face reluctantly withdrew itself from the sick room. "Lucky that the enfranchisement of my charming sex won't come on in my lifetime," she thought. "If Mrs. Forsyth's physi-

cian were a woman, I should find her a good deal more troublesome to deal with than poor, dear, stupid old Doctor Crawford ! ”

And then Miss Forrester put away her book of devotions, having first made it turn several lengthened, but irreverent, somersaults in the air, and seating herself down before the comfortably blazing fire, began to eat her breakfast.

She made an excellent meal ; her superb digestion carrying her through it with as hearty a zest as though she had been out for a ten-mile forest ride, instead of breathing the close air of a London bed-room. Patty, pheasant, grapes—not one of the viands that had excited Mary’s jealousy, were overlooked. Half a tumbler of the finest Chateau-Margaux concluded the repast, after which Miss Forrester returned to her easy chair, drew forth a yellow paper volume from beneath its cushion, and, stretching out her little slippered feet to the fire, settled herself down to read with every appearance of material and physical enjoyment.

Differently placed, she would have finished her breakfast by a cigarette ; but in the state to

which it had pleased Providence to call her, this was impossible ; and her morning stimulus was perforce a mental one — " La Princesse Parisienne," by M. de Balzac. Miss Forrester had an old-fashioned and not altogether unhealthy taste in literature. As a proof of this, Balzac was the one among French writers who satisfied her best. No word in all that mass of detail ever wearied her attention ; no faintest movement of the scalpel in all that patient dissection of moral gangrene and corruption was lost upon her. She liked Balzac as she would have liked, had she ever read English novels of such a date, the hard prosaic accuracy of Defoe. She had known scores of women like the Princesse Parisienne ; she could enter, heart and soul, into the memoir of her disappointments, her projects, her successes, her toilettes, her profound unconscious depravity ! " Fanny," and the " Lady of the Camellias," with their alternations of milk-and-water temptation and milk-and-water remorse, were simply to her sentimental young women, about whom sentimental young men wrote impossible stories. *This* was life ; and so ab-



sorbed was she in her enjoyment of it, and of the fire, and of that indescribable state of completeness only known to the rare human creature who can digest, that the patient, rousing from her stupor, had to moan and turn feebly on her pillow more than once before awakening the attention of the devoted nurse "who had sat up with her like a daughter." But as soon as she knew herself to be needed, Miss Forrester shut her book at once, rose, and walked up to the bedside. Mrs. Forsyth's eyes were wide open, and her companion looked into them and read more of consciousness there than she had read during the last three days. Had the end indeed come? She wondered this; she desired this, from her soul, as she stood there looking fixedly into her mistress's face; then she laid her finger, her cool, nervous untrembling finger upon the wasted wrist, and sought for the pulse.

It was impossible to count its beats, the tide of life had weakened to so faint an ebb. Yes, the preceding twelve hours had advanced rapidly indeed towards the last great change of all; and with an intense sigh of relief and pity (for her-

self) Miss Forrester came to the conclusion that her duties were well-nigh ended.

But no great general good or ill, ever made Honoria forgetful of detail. "Old Crawford will be here directly," she thought, "prying about into all the cups and tea-spoons as usual. I must be prepared. The question is, can there be any need to torture a woman in such a state as this with nourishment still?"


In other words, could the patient still swallow? Even people like Honoria Forrester make use of euphemisms in their self-communings. Mrs. Forsyth could swallow: did swallow, greedily, and with upturned pleading gaze, about a spoonful and a-half of sugar and water that Miss Forrester gave her: swallowed it more with the avidity of exhaustion craving for food, than with the unconsciousness of fever seeking solace for its thirst.

"We must use means while means are in our reach!" soliloquised Honoria. "'My dear young lady, these things are in the hands of higher powers, but all that attention *can* do,' et cetera. How well I know every word the old hypocrite

will say while he holds my hand, and pretends not to know he's squeezing it! 'Have you given the teaspoonful of broth every two hours? *and* the wine? but I see you have.' And he will be right."

And lifting the lid from a small silver lamp, Miss Forrester took a tea-spoonful of soup out of the cup that stood ready heated in hot water, and swallowed it herself. She then returned to the patient's side, refreshed the corpse-like face and hands by softly wiping them with eau-de-cologne and water, smoothed and re-arranged the fever-tossed pillows, and then raised the dying woman upon them with that peculiar unison of strength and gentleness that made her so admirable a nurse.

She had just completed these offices, and was still standing with one outstretched arm supporting Mrs. Forsyth's pillow, when a muffled knock came at the house door. A minute later the old physician entered the sick room. Every one of Honoria Forrester's attitudes were good; but at this moment she had selected about the strongest of the whole *répertoire*, and the doctor's eyes,



dazzled by that white full arm—for the wide sleeves of her morning wrapper had fallen back, and displayed it almost to the shoulder—by the flowing lines of that luxuriant figure, by the drooping grace of that averted golden head: the doctor’s eyes, dazzled by these things, did not for a second or two fall upon the patient’s dying face. By the time they did he was thinking—well, old man though he was, he was thinking of Miss Forrester.

“I have been looking for you so long, Doctor Crawford; I am so thankful you have come.” And Miss Forrester tenderly shifted the position of her helpless burthen, and extended her warm firm hand to the doctor, who retained it, as she had predicted, for a considerable time within his own.

Doctor Crawford was an orthodox, old-fashioned doctor, who shut his eyes resolutely to all new-fangled theories about nature, and non-intervention, and such nonsense. A man believing in himself and in his own drugs, and holding disease (as a parson would a dissenter) to be a direct and hostile enemy that must be extirpated

by fire and sword. He was scrupulous to eccentricity in his care of his patients. Twice a day during the last fortnight he had visited Mrs. Forsyth, and on each occasion had administered her medicine with his own hands, or watched it administered by Miss Forrester. If a woman taking the medicine prescribed by him regularly continued to sink, what could it show but that the enemy was too strong for human means to defeat? A sceptical disciple of the new school, looking to other means than drugs for help, might have searched more narrowly for the cause of that deadly prostration which day by day was leading Mrs. Forsyth to her grave. But Doctor Crawford, as I have said, was orthodox; and Miss Forrester was very beautiful; and, in spite of his grey hairs and grown-up children, the doctor was a great admirer of beautiful women; and somehow, after the first inquiries for the patient had been made, the medicine swallowed, the routine questions as to nourishment asked and answered; after the first professional three or four minutes had elapsed of each visit, it had happened that the doctor's mind was more

carried away from his duty than it had ever been before during the last five-and-twenty years, at least, of his professional career.

But, in spite of the bare white arms, and golden head, and warm firm hand, Doctor Crawford had no sooner put back the curtain and seen the livid sunken face that lay there than his own changed ominously. For a greater enemy than disease; an enemy against whom all pharmacopœias and colleges of surgeons are impotent, was staring at him full! He had known Mrs. Forsyth for years, and held her hand with real feeling for a minute or two, searching, as Miss Forrester had searched, for the fast-ebbing pulse. Then he laid it down gently on the coverlid of the bed, and, moving noiselessly across the room to the window, signed to Honoria to follow him.

"The change has come, Miss Forrester," he said, looking pityingly into her eyes. "I never hide the truth from a friend, however devoted. Mrs. Forsyth is dying."

Miss Forrester clasped her hands out towards him, and turned her face away, *en profile perdu*,

as from her youth upward she had always seen the first artists do under grief.

“Dying!” she murmured. “Oh, this is sudden! Doctor, are you sure?”

“Mrs. Forsyth will not last, in all human probability, until this time to-morrow. When the disease, my dear young lady, in cases like this, once invades the mesenteric glands, the natural nourishment of the body, as you are no doubt aware, cannot pass into the blood, and the patient, no matter what amount of food he takes, dies starved ——”

Honoria Forrester started.

“You have, of course—I need not ask you—continued to give the nourishment regularly? Do so still, unless the patient is evidently pained by its administration. And—and——” here he took both her hands, and for the first time since he had known her found them suddenly damp and cold; “try as much as possible to keep your own strength and spirits up. You have done marvels hitherto, Miss Forrester, but the worst of all is before you. I don’t think you should be alone to-night.”

“No,” she answered, “I will not be alone ; I don’t think I could stand it. You had better send some one here—a hired nurse, if you will, who understands these scenes. I know nothing of death-beds or of deaths.”

She almost snatched her cold hands away from him, and walking up to the fire-place, stood and stared down with a singular, blank sort of frightened expression into the fire.

*Dies starved!* What did the man mean by speaking like that? Why did he look at her so fixedly? Why did he stand there watching her now?

She held out her hands to the fire; but no warmth entered their suddenly-frozen veins. She tried to collect herself and speak; but the words died, inarticulate, upon her quivering lips.

*Dies starved!* Of all Doctor Crawford’s little medical farrago, only those two words remained distinctly, horribly clear upon her memory. She knew that her face was—must be—ashen with that sick shudder at her heart, and bowed her head down abruptly in her clasped hands as she stood.



And good Doctor Crawford crept silently from the room, with his eyes quite overflowing for the handsome, devoted, faithful young woman, who in another twenty-four hours would be left without a protector in the world !

## CHAPTER II.

### THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS RESPECTABILITY.

THE winter day dragged on slower than any day had ever dragged in Honoria Forrester's life. Before the doctor's visit she had enjoyed her breakfast, and the blazing fire, and her hopes of speedy release, and the "Princesse Parisienne;" and now, with no greater burthen on her mind than then, she sat cowering, cold and sick, before the hearth; longing, she, usually so strong in her own strength, for the arrival of the nurse; starting nervously at every muffled sound that reached her from the bark-covered street below.

Dies starved!

What, *what* did he mean her to understand by that? Was it indeed a common, natural death for people labouring under Mrs. Forsyth's

disease? If the old man made use of the same terms in speaking of it to others, would those two sickening words rivet their attention as they had done hers? She knew that Mrs. Forsyth had not left her money as some of her relations hoped she would leave it. The sum of two thousand pounds was bequeathed to herself, a stranger, and the bulk of the property went to one rich and distant cousin, with whom none of the family had been on terms for years. How, if these relations, already prejudiced against her, should hear Doctor Crawford's description of the death? How, if they should whisper abroad the horrible suspicion that the dead woman had not been dealt fairly with in her illness?

"They could prove nothing," she cried, almost aloud, and clasping her hands till the nails, unfelt, made cruel marks upon her rigid palms. "Prove? What is to be proved? What a fool to my own fancy am I growing! Want of air and exercise are just giving me nerves like other women." She was right as a matter of simple fact here, however faulty in her ethics. "If my lungs had been breathing pure air, and my

stomach digesting its food rightly, I couldn't fear. I never have feared. Fear—what have I to fear? Haven't I nursed her as no servant, as very few daughters, would have done? Haven't I borne with her tempers night and day, soothed her, made her miserable life less miserable for the last two years? She was to die. Doctor Crawford says so. The disease was mortal. Why do I trouble myself about the technical term in which a doting old man chooses to speak of the symptoms of her death? Shall I be so much bettered by her death, even? Is two thousand pounds in money anything like an equivalent for the hundred a year and home and luxuries I have now? Why, 'tis evident that I am a loser—that 'twas to my interest my benefactress should not die. . . . Can those who have been wishing her dead, murdering her in their hearts for years, dare to raise a breath against me and the fidelity with which I have served her to the last?"

And still the fire would not give warmth to Honoria Forrester's clammy hands. Still she longed for the arrival of the hired nurse. Still

she started nervously at every sound that reached her from the street below. Yes, the sick-room must be telling upon her; want of air and exercise must be lowering her muscular and nervous system, and giving her foolish, cowardly fancies, like other women.

Late in the afternoon the nurse-tender, from Doctor Crawford, was ushered into the room by Mary. "Now that it's too late, Mr. Thomas, and that all the nurse-tenders in England couldn't do missus an ounce of good!" She was a little mild-eyed, apple-faced woman, quite unlike the typical or Gampish London nurse, and introduced herself apologetically to Miss Forrester, in a whisper, as Mrs. Perigreen. Honoria, never a person of many words, received the announcement in absolute silence, and at once seated herself with her feet upon the fender, and in such a position as wholly prevented her new companion from watching her face.

But Mrs. Perigreen, accustomed to all eccentric workings of human nature under affliction, was not a whit chilled by the young lady's cold-

ness. Poor young lady, had not Doctor Crawford said that she was losing the only friend she possessed in this dying woman, whom she had nursed with such devotion through her illness?

“Shall I bring you some tea, Miss, please?” she whispered, by-and-by, after going to the patient’s side and seeing that there she was not wanted. “A cup of tea would do you good, my dear. It is no use to take on so.”

“My dear!” Honoria stared up blankly in the woman’s face, and as she did so an odd, a most unwonted, feeling smote at her heart. She was thinking—God knows of what she was thinking, of what recollections of her past life, what laborious schemes for the future—when these strange and homely words fell on her ears, and in a moment her memory went back, with a start, to another death-chamber than this: a chamber in a squalid Paris garret, where the only woman’s lips that had ever spoken to her with tenderness—her mother’s—had stiffened, fourteen years before, in death.

“Well—yes; I’ll have some tea,” she answered shortly. “It’ll do me good. But I am

not taking on," Honoria Forrester never told one unnecessary lie, "I'm only tired and sick.

Then she turned away again, and never spoke when Mrs. Perigreen brought her her tea, but just swallowed it mechanically, and kept staring into the fire, as she had done so many hours that day, and with her face still resolutely turned from the sight of Mrs. Forsyth's dying form.

The Doctor came again between seven and eight, and found his patient still in a kind of heavy stupor; neither better nor actually worse. With the change in Miss Forrester he was startled. Her eyes were dull and leaden; an unnatural, deep red glowed on her cheeks.

"You will be ill yourself, young lady," he remarked, as she followed him to the door. "You are worn down to the last stage of exhaustion. Let the nurse sit up to-night. I am as sure of her attention as I would be of yours; and do you go to your bed and sleep. Now take my advice."

"Doctor," she answered, in a hoarse whisper, "I don't want to think of myself at all, but of her. Is—is what you told me this morning

true? She *can't* recover—the disease is always a fatal one?”

The great lustrous eyes looked so entreatingly into his, that Doctor Crawford softened like a child. What a heart, what a noble nature, had this beautiful young creature, of whom he had heard so many women—Mrs. Crawford among them—say such hard things! “The disease is not invariably a fatal one, my dear young lady; but Mrs. Forsyth has reached a point now from which recovery is utterly impossible. When once certain glands become, as I explained to you this morning, invaded with disease, neither medicine nor food can pass into the blood, and the patient ——” but he stopped himself short before the blanched horror of his listener’s face.

“And you know that this—that this is now Mrs. Forsyth’s case?” she stammered.

“I know it: I knew it long ago,” he answered. “When Chandos and I held our first consultation—five, six weeks ago, was it not?—our opinions precisely agreed. Mrs. Forsyth had every symptom then of a disease from which there could be no recovery.”



“Thank you. I know the worst now. I can bear it.”

She went back into the room, walked straight up to the bed-side, and looked steadfastly down, as she had once before done that day, upon her patient. “And so, it was to be,” she thought. “And so this wonderful disease that makes people die starved had, after all, set in weeks ago! What a fool, what a contemptible coward, my own wretched fancy has made of me! What a life it is, in which two chance words, dropped from an old man’s garrulous lips, can palsy a stout human being’s nerves, and chill the blood for a day! I was in my sane senses this morning when I said that it would be cruelty, not mercy, to hold back such an existence as this. I say it now. Life is for the strong; money is for the strong. If I was in her place who lies here, how would I thank any one who should strive to hold me to my miserable mockery of existence? And to think that I have been sentimentalising—I! during a whole afternoon—almost wishing her well and myself in chains again, and well-nigh melting into tears, like a

provincial at the play, when yonder little lachrymose professional hypocrite spoke to me just now! By-the-way, that reminds me. From her dress and manner I should judge her to be a methodist, so it would be well to lock up the jewel-cases without delay."

The little professional hypocrite, quite unconscious either of methodism or dishonesty, was meekly standing at the bottom of the bed chafing the patient's feet as she had been ordered; and her kind homely face lit up as she watched the poor young lady "make an effort," and commence busying herself about the room.

Mrs. Forsyth was the possessor of a small fortune in precious stones, all of which were unlocked in various cases upon the dressing-table—for in the earlier stages of her illness she had liked to have her trinkets at hand, spreading them out daily on the bed, as a sick child would his toys—and it was a work of time for Miss Forrester to arrange them all in their places as Mrs. Forsyth herself used to keep them. These jewels were uncatalogued, and only included, with other personal property, in the will; and

Miss Forrester knew that it was so. And she was needy; and money, as a means, was her god; and here were diamond rings and crosses without number, and it needed but to turn her back and hide a hundred pounds' worth or so away, and no man be the wiser. But the desire, the imagination even, never crossed her brain. To each temperament is its temptation. Small larcenies, such as some virtuous and even high-born ladies have succumbed to, were not among Honoria's. She put every smallest thing of worth away as carefully as Mrs. Forsyth's own daughter could have done; fastened the keys belonging to the different cases to her own watch-chain; and then stowed away the cases themselves into a secret drawer of one of the bureaux, of which she also took the key.

This done, she went back to her place beside the fire. It was a bitterly cold night; even into that curtained room the piercing breath of the sleet-charged north wind made its way; but the high-piled fire roared with as merry a sound as though a jovial winter party, instead of two silent watchers of a dying woman, were assembled

beside it ; and the little kettle on the hob purred cheerily ; and the crickets chirped, defiant and blithe and ceaseless, as I think only thoroughbred London crickets can.

“ I always like that sound, Miss,” observed the little nurse in a professional undertone. She had given up the Sisyphus-like task of attempting to bring back warmth to feet that never should be warm again, and was sitting with a well-worn book in her hand beside the fire. “ Don’t you, Miss, please ? It sounds so cheery and home-like.”

“ What sound ? ” said Miss Forrester, to whom domestic sentiment was an entirely untrodden field ; “ the snow beating on the window, or the kettle boiling over ? ”

“ Well, Miss, I like to hear the kettle droning too ; but what I meant was the crickets. Whenever I hear them it seems to me like my own home again ; and then, sitting up night after night, sick-tending and watching of the dead, Miss, one feels glad of any company, even a dumb thing like a cricket.”

Miss Forrester was not devoid of an occasional

hard interest in the weaknesses of other human beings; above all, a simple sort of human creature reposing blandly on old beliefs and prejudices, had power to arrest her fancy. She looked down at this little apple-faced woman, who babbled about crickets with her Prayer-book (of course it must be a Prayer-book) on her knee; this wretched woman who spent her time patiently rubbing sick people's feet, and breathing sick people's horrible atmosphere, and thought she would amuse herself for a minute by hearing what views such a being could possibly have of life.

"Not a very cheerful profession yours, Mrs. Perigreen. What made you take to it—choice or necessity?"

"Well, Miss—but please, do you take a chair. I don't like to see you stand. It was necessity first, and now I believe I may say it's choice. I've got used to the sick and their ways; and Doctor Crawford and Doctor Chandos both recommend me; and, except for breaking of rest, I've nothing to complain of; and next year, please God, my daughter Sarah is off my hands, I hope to lay by a bit, and ——"

"Ah," interrupted Honoria, who abhorred prolixity, "and in the meantime you have your religious trust, no doubt, to sustain you. I am glad to see that you read your Frayer-book regularly, Mrs. Perigreen."

The little nurse blushed crimson. "Well, Miss," she said, "I do read my Prayer-book occasionally, as I trust we all do ; but this isn't one. I hope you wont take it amiss that I should open such a book in a sick-room ; but every night of my life, since I lost my son, I've read, if it's only a few lines, out of it for his sake. He was washed overboard coming from Australia, Miss, and one of his mates sent me a parrot he was bringing home for me and this book. It's called 'Gulliver's Travels,' and I can't say I make much out of it, or indeed that it's altogether to my mind ; still, Miss, you see it was his favourite book, and all I have left of him—for the parrot got choked on a hazel-nut, two years ago come Michaelmas, and he was my only son as lived to be a man."

Miss Forrester was silent. The little mild-faced woman making her Talmud out of "Gulli-

ver's Travels" for her dead son's sake, did not appeal to her sense of the ridiculous as any orthodox exposition of piety would infallibly have done.

"As long as my boy lived, I kept up at the dress-making," went on Mrs. Perigreen, looking very apologetic for speaking about herself at all, "so that he might have a home to come to between his voyages; but when I lost him I hadn't the heart like to care for housekeeping any longer; and, besides, my eyes were too bad to work at night for a good time after I heard of his death, and one and another said 'Try nurse-tending, Mrs. Perigreen, it'll take your thoughts off more than any work;' and that's how I began it, Miss, and have never been disengaged, except once when I caught the fever and was took to the hospital, since."

"And are contented, no doubt. Want for nothing on earth, Mrs. Perigreen?"

The woman looked at her wistfully. "I want nothing particular now," she answered, "but to say this is what I once thought I should come to would be untrue. Why, when I married, I'd as much linen as would go into two of those

biggest presses, and as neat a parlour as any farmer's wife in Essex, and a girl to do my hard work. And we should have gone on well, and I should have my family round me now, instead of being a lone woman as you see me, but for one thing, and that was money."

"Or rather the want of it, I suppose?" suggested Miss Forrester.

"No, no, Miss. Money, ill-gotten money, money that hardened my husband's heart—him that was once so fond of his children!—and preyed on his mind, for he knew it was ill-gotten, and drove him at last to take to the drink that ruined him and all of us! He had an old father, Miss," she went on in a whisper, and looking nervously towards the patient's bed, "as old, perhaps, as your poor lady, or older, and one elder brother; and one morning the old man was found dead quite unexpected in his bed. It was an out-of-the-way place, and there was no crowner's inquest nor nothing; but all the country people said, and say still, the old man didn't come to his end by fair means; and for all they were so respectably off, it was found the son had



entered him for four burial clubs, two of them not a month before his death. Well, my husband he heard what was being said, and one night, just after the funeral, when his brother was at our house, he up and told him, and as good as threatened to have the old man's body taken up and post-mortumed. And Robert—I mind his face as well as if I see it yesterday—Robert talked him down, and says he ‘the old man's lived long enough, and his life did no good to himself nor no one else.’ And then he went on, bit by bit, to offering my husband a good share of the money, hush-money, blood-money as it was! Well, Miss, after he was gone, I begged and prayed, and went down on my knees beside the children's bed, and besought him never to touch a shilling that came out of Robert's hand, and he said he wouldn't. But he was a weak man, although as good a heart as God ever made: and we were a little behind with our rent at that time: and a few days later he used bitter words again to Robert about the old man's death: and Robert tempted him again with money to keep him silent, and—

he fell! From that day till he died, I never see one happy smile upon his face again."

"And Robert?" asked Miss Forrester, interested, in spite of herself.

"Robert, Miss, never had heart nor conscience neither: consequently his guilt couldn't prey. Robert's living respected, now, with a good business in malt near Deptford. I wouldn't go nigh him; I wouldn't break bread of his if I was starving on the streets; but my girl tells me that her uncle Robert's getting quite the gentleman, and sending his eldest daughter—God pity the child!—to boarding school."

"Which shows clearly how inestimable a blessing a conscience is," said Miss Forrester, drily. "Thank you for the story, Mrs. Perigreen, and please light up a fire in the dressing-room. I shall try to get an hour or two's rest, while you keep watch over Mrs. Forsyth."

But she turned her eyes shortly away towards the fire as she spoke, and held them there until the nurse had obeyed her orders, and returned again to her post beside the bed. She was not superstitious; she was not sensitive: but the

persistence with which one class of ideas seemed thrust upon her to-day oppressed her horribly. First, the maundering old man with those words of his that had haunted her so for hours, and now this simpleton with her details of blood-money, and scared conscience, and tardy retribution. Would these twenty-four hours never go by? Would another day never dawn? — Another fresh, vigorous young day, the beginning of a new free life, unoppressed by these contemptible nightmares, by these four prison walls, by that ghastly dying face, which, while she shuddered to look at it, she yet had not the courage to give over utterly into the keeping of another.

The maxim of Honoria Forrester's life, her sole moral code, her theology, her by-stay, was work. In crises wherein women of ordinary faiths would take laudanum, or prostrate themselves before a saint, living or dead, she employed her fingers and found consolation; the desire for self-forgetfulness, attaining self-forgetfulness—in short—indifferent of the particular form, or ritual observed. She had work before her now; work that she had always told herself must be

accomplished at Mrs. Forsyth's death; and, after giving the nurse a strict parting injunction, to call her at the slightest change that should take place in the patient, she went into the dressing-room, locked the door noiselessly that communicated from it into the sick chamber, and began her task.

It was a lengthened one—the sorting, and in most cases burning, all her relics and letters of the last ten years. Vitally important though it was that no evidence of her past career should exist, she had never yet been able to bring herself to destroy these things. During her distasteful, frightfully-monotonous bondage to Mrs. Forsyth it had been her one pleasure, her breathing-space, her ten minutes of life, out of each twenty-four hours of stagnant vegetation, to steal away to her own room and open her boxes and gaze at, and read over, the trophies of that buried past whose very existence had become a thing to be ashamed of and ignored. But she was too acutely foreseeing to succumb to any such sentimentalism now. At the onset of Mrs. Forsyth's illness she had had all her possessions brought

into this dressing-room, to which she alone had access. In her lonely watches, watches when she would sit casting up every possible mischance or combination of mischances that might occur to her, she had decided that every compromising letter, every suspicious scrap of paper, every address, every card that she possessed, must be burnt before the hour of Mrs. Forsyth's death. Why, the first act of the next of kin might be to have her things searched before allowing them to leave the house ; and then, if a hint of the truth once got whispered abroad, adieu to the whole scheme, whose fair fabric she had been diligently building up for months, for years past ! Everything that could, by possibility, bear witness against her—everything belonging to the old—must be destroyed ; and this was the moment for their destroyal.

She waited till the fire had kindled up with a steady roaring blaze, then unlocked her boxes, and one by one took out and spread upon the floor every letter, every relic, that was to constitute the holocaust.

Of notes, mostly glossy coroneted notes,

there were scores and scores. Some written in crabbed German, some few in English, the vast majority in French. Heaps of these she burnt without a glance; a dozen she lingered over; three she read through before throwing them in the fire. This was the bulk of her correspondence. Then came a small packet of letters, all of which she read before destroying, and out of whose number two or three were put aside and kept. And then came the hardest to destroy of all—her relics.

These relics consisted almost entirely of chaplets and bouquets, so withered now that they crumbled beneath the touch, so shrunk out of all likeness to flowers that it was impossible even to herself to remember whether these lifeless mummies had once been odorous crowns of myrtle or costly bouquets of roses, camellias, and azalias. Surely no ball-going young lady ever kept so many faded flowers as Miss Forrester did, or treated them with such care; for most of these skeletons of old triumphs were hoarded in a separate box, and all of them were labelled, "The duc D'A——," "Prince L——," "Lord——."

This was the kind of label each bouquet bore.

Well, she gathered them together, approached the fire with a sort of effort, and burnt them, feeling as the flames flickered for a moment higher, much as some young women feel who, on the eve of an excellent marriage, burn up, for safety, all record of the foolish, unprofitable, moneyless, happy past. Then she opened a cardboard box, somewhat larger than the others, and with reverent hands took out what her whole face and gesture showed to be her crowing treasure, her pet idolatry,—that to her which “Gulliver’s Travels” was to the little nurse in the adjoining room. A faded bouquet still, or rather a small crown of faded flowers; but with this difference from the rest, that a diamond agrafe sparkled amidst the dead leaves, and that it was labelled in Honoria’s own French-looking hand, with these intoxicating words, “SA MAJESTÉ!” No date was here. None was needed. It was written in her heart. No further explanation of the gift, or of the giver, “SA MAJESTÉ.”

She raised the chaplet, tenderly disengaging

the agrafe from its stem, and took off the label. These, of course, she could keep. What story is there in a diamond agrafe in a jewel-box, and a scrap of paper containing the words *Sa Majesté* in a writing-desk? But it cut her to the very soul to have to do so ; to think that she would never more feast her eyes on that wreath, and that agrafe, and those two words in their delicious juxtaposition ! and to think that they were hers, and to remember the heavenly hour in which they first became so ! She had burnt the letters of old familiar associates without an emotion ; but genuine tears came in her eyes as she pressed her lips on the flower-stalks that had once left the scarcely less sapless hand of royalty itself. As tender as she could feel for anything, she felt when, a minute later, *Sa Majesté's* gift made the flame for a second leap up higher as its predecessors had done.

The work of destruction over, Miss Forrester had to think of another subject, and a more important one still ; the letters it behoved her to keep. They were not numerous ; and whereas the former letters were all addressed in French,



these were invariably directed in plain English, "Miss Honoria Forrester, care of Miss Jarvis, The Cedars, Peckham."

Half-a-dozen of them were directed in one hand: an unformed woman's hand, more French than English; and one of these Honoria opened and read through. It bore the same burthen as so many family letters, even among the most respectable persons, do bear—a request for money; contained allusions to failing strength, laborious work, and cruel friends, and was signed "Nita." Honoria Forrester smiled as she read it; then she made these letters up into a little packet, labelled them (mixing plenty of water with the ink to give it a faded look) "from my unhappy sister Nita," and put them away again in her desk. A note or two from Mrs. Forsyth, also addressed "Miss Forrester, Peckham," and written just before engaging her as companion, she laid side by side with "Nita's," also a book-marker marked in blue beads, "for my dear teacher, Honoria Forrester," an inexpensive pamphlet "On the Eternity of Punishment," presented to Miss Forrester as a mark of

esteem by the Reverend Alfred Prettyman, at the examination of Miss Jarvis's pupils, Peckham, July, 185—, and one or two bills, so trifling in amount that it seemed ridiculous to keep them any longer, for dress rendered to Miss Honoria Forrester, The Cedars, Peckham.

Nothing remained now but five or six notes, recently written in a bold thoroughly English hand, and addressed to Harley Street. She read them all through, and tossed them down in bitter disgust, as she thought how little there was in them to read. "Dear Miss Forrester,— Could you make any use of a box at the opera to-night? Yours, Henry Bryanstone," being a fair average specimen of their length and style. "No good to keep them," she thought; "things that could neither benefit me nor compromise him. Cold, stupid, measured like himself, and the rest of his hateful nation!" She crunched each viciously between her hands before flinging it (a pity Mr. Bryanstone could not have seen the gesture!) into the fire; then she fastened up her cases; noiselessly unlocked the bed-room door; pinned up her hair; she would have

done that, I believe, on the eve of a certain day of judgment ; and laid herself down upon the sofa and slept.

Yes, slept. With the sound sweet sleep of vigorous animal health ; untroubled by dreams of former triumphs, or nightmares of present fears ; of “ Sa Majesté,” or Henry Bryanstone, or the patient who was “ dying starved ! ”

Mrs. Perigreen has since averred that, when she stole in early next morning to break to her how, without change or struggle, the patient’s spirit had left this valley of tears, a smile, such as a blessed new-born baby or angel above might wear, was on that poor young lady’s innocent, sleeping face !

## CHAPTER III.

### “WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK.”

MORE than a fortnight had elapsed since Mrs. Forsyth's death. The blinds were still decorously half-drawn, thereby marking the transitioned, or resigned, stage of grief; and in the dim light of the great, silent drawing-room Miss Forrester sat alone, one rainy afternoon, and communed within herself as to what should be her next step in life.

For she had not been turned out of the house, neither had her boxes been searched. Had the wishes of the enraged next of kin been carried out, these and other good offices would have been duly performed for her within a very short time after the reading of Mrs. Forsyth's will. But the distant cousin who inherited was in a position to be generous. Did not the doctor say

the girl was a good girl, and had nursed her mistress faithfully? Was it a worthy thing for the family to be jealous of, or in any way question, the poor bequest of two thousand pounds to a personal attendant? ("Mighty fine talking for John, who has got everything!" said all the disappointed relations.) For himself, he saw no reason to think badly of Miss Forrester. Many a young woman in her position would from time to time have got hold of some of the personal property; and even Mrs. Forsyth's own sister allowed that the jewels were intact. Miss Forrester was quite at liberty to make use of the house in Harley Street for a month; after which time his wife and daughters would come up from Yorkshire and spend the season ("Mrs. John spend the season!" sneered all the other relations) in town.

Miss Forrester accepted the offer, and was glad of it. It gave her position for the time being, and no one knew better than she did the value of that word; still it gave her no more. Mrs. Forsyth's death had insured to her 2000*l.* and freedom. But she wanted a great deal

more than this to attain to what she desired. She wanted friends, and she had no friends ; she wanted a woman’s hand to uphold her and bring her forward in society, and no such hand presented or was likely to present itself.

Was the whole scheme beyond her powers ? she asked herself, as she paced restlessly up and down the handsome drawing-room, in her handsome black silk and crape. Should she throw it up, take her two thousand pounds thankfully, go back again to the Continent, fly at the smaller game of which she was certain, and throw her ambitious dream of English society, and English money, and an English marriage to the winds ?

I dare say most ambitious men have, if they would confess it, these moments of weakness and discouragement. We read only the record of success ; but how do we know what the Duke felt before Waterloo, or Napoleon before Austerlitz ? Honoria Forrester, in common with all inborn adventurers, was fatalistic. She did not consult a little five-sous Book of Fate, like the Emperor of the French, but she allowed circumstances to be her oracle. Many excellent persons under

difficulty open their Koran or Talmud, according to their country, and from whatsoever passage the fore-finger of the right hand chance to rest upon, receive or make to themselves counsel. Miss Forrester, who prided herself on her absence of superstition, was making up for herself a like cabalistic process at this moment.

“London is wide and dreary,” she thought, looking out with a shudder into the foggy street, “and, barring one chance, the game of stopping here is not worth the candle. What does English society want with me, or I with it? I have my fortune, my two thousand pounds, safe—not a bad payment for my two years of slavery!—so far, what I went in for I have won. Now comes the question, how far this English mine may safely be worked? In everything about this house I am right. She has been dead a fortnight, and the will has been read, and the doctor has declared me before all the family to be an angel, and the heir allows me to remain four weeks under his roof. But with Bryanstone it looks bad—bad! A fortnight, and he has left his card once to inquire: no

note, no message ; nothing but this. And do I care if I get him ? If I was married to him, would I be really better off ? Of course I would, because I would have a name and money ! But, Grand Dieu ! how much slavery with it ? —yes, slavery ! Visit-paying, dinner-eating, church-going, card-leaving, senseless lying of all kinds. If I levanted now, I should have my two thousand pounds and be free. I’ve not aged a bit : I look younger than when I came here first ; and I’d utilise all the fine mourning they’ve given me, and go to Rome as a widow —the widow of an American officer newly killed. I always wanted to be in Rome in Holy Week, and I’d pick up Fifine on my way for duenna (she must be old enough for anything now), and take a grand apartment, and perhaps find a better thing—English, too, very likely—than Mr. Henry Bryanstone, with his handsome face, and his insolence, and his prospective baronetcy. I must be in second weeds, or I should have to wear my hair plain—second weeds, and sent to Europe in the hope of recovering my health. No one could find out anything about a widow



from America in time to spoil my game, and grief is one of the things I do best; and if it comes to nothing, I'd go on to Naples and look up little Taroni and have some play. I resolve it! Unless I hear from Bryanstone between this and to-morrow night, I leave London, with precious little regret for it or him."

But the churches of Rome were not destined to see Miss Forrester among their Pascal worshippers that year. The final decision had scarcely passed through her mind, before a carriage stopped at the door of Mrs. Forsyth's house. In another minute a card, containing the words "Mrs. Fairfax," was in Miss Forrester's hand.

"At home? of course I'm at home!" she exclaimed to the open-mouthed charwoman who had brought the card up, suspiciously, like a natural curiosity, in the corner of her apron. (Mr. Thomas's admirable proportions had at once secured him other plush, and the women-servants, one and all, had marched straight out of the house as soon as their mistress was buried.) "Of course I'm at home. Go down

this moment, and show the lady in, you foolish old woman.”

She flew to the glass; all her dreams of Rome and widowhood dispelled in a moment by the unsuspected excitement of this excellent reality; she passed her hand rapidly, but with a firm hand, over her cheeks; she pushed back her hair as plain and flat as it would go from her forehead. For the first time in her life she didn't care if she looked hideous. All that she instinctively felt she needed was, to look respectable. For Mrs. Fairfax was Henry Bryanstone's sister.

“A lady, ma'am,” announced the charwoman, looking furtively round the door first, after the manner of her kind; and then there sounded a little condescending cough, and the rustle of sweeping silks, and Mr. Bryanstone's sister walked in.

She was a very small, very pretty, very English-looking woman, dressed in a prodigiously training green silk, a velvet mantle that nearly covered her, a pink bonnet, and light gloves. You could not call her anything but

pretty, for she was very pretty, beautiful almost, when you examined the clear-cut little features line by line. She had a perfectly formed nose and mouth, a smooth high forehead, the complexion at thirty of a girl, and a pair of very wide-open, nut-brown eyes.

"But all for nothing!" thought Honoria, taking her measure in an instant: "A nonsense-woman, that men would call pretty, weary of in five minutes, and never look at again. Madame," advancing with her suave foreign manner, "allow me to offer you a place." After which she stood calmly self-possessed, but perfectly respectful; while little Mrs. Fairfax, who wanted to patronise her, coloured up to the eyes like a school-girl, and passed on into a chair.

"I called, Miss Forrester, to——my brother has mentioned that you were in want of a situation."

"Madame, I have newly lost my only friend." Miss Forrester said this with a foreign accent, and her lips quivered a little as she spoke. Decidedly grief was one of the things she did best.

"So I have heard." And now Mrs. Fairfax

began to take Honoria's measure in her turn; and she decided, poor little woman! that the girl was quite plain—hideous sandy hair, and a thick waist. "Indeed, my cousin, Lady Lemmington, knew your employer well, and often spoke to me about her illness; and—and these things must be submitted to, Miss Forrester. We must kiss the chastening rod. Every earthly trial we meet with is for our eternal good, and so you'll find in time, although I wouldn't for one moment lead you to expect you'll have such a salary again. As I said to Henry, Mrs. Forsyth was eccentric."

"Madame," said Honoria, looking through her downcast eyelashes into Mrs. Fairfax's face, "I don't desire a salary. It is indifferent to me if I enter into another English family or not; but if I do so, it will be for a home only. By Mrs. Forsyth's generosity I am placed quite above the necessity for work for the future."

"Oh! and you mean to return to France, then, I suppose?" asked Mrs. Fairfax, taken a good deal aback, as Honoria intended she should be.

"I am uncertain. My friends all want me to return; but I think perhaps I may stay in England yet another year. It depends upon my hearing of a situation likely to suit me."

Mrs. Fairfax fidgetted with the folds of her rustling silk, gave a little cough again, and looked into the fire. She was mean to her heart's core, this woman, who possessed three or four thousand a-year, at least; and to get a yard of calico below the market-price, or a governess who only wanted a "nominal" salary, was just about the strongest temptation her hard, little, narrow nature could sustain. And Honoria had guessed at this (I can no more tell you how than she could have told you herself. Are women's flashes of intelligence respecting each other ever capable of analysis?), and had thrown out her lure accordingly.

"You are accustomed to tuition, Miss Forsyth? I think I've heard you filled a position of the kind before you went to Mrs. Forsyth?"

"Madame, I lived for seven years as pupil-teacher and governess in a school—the Miss Jarvises', at Peckham."

“And you instruct in French and German, of course?”

“French I speak the same, better for accent, than English, for my mother was a French woman, and I was born and brought up in Paris.”

“And German and Italian?”

“I can instruct in them—yes.”

“Music, of course?”

“Of course.”

“And dancing?”

“Madame, no. I was not aware that dancing would ever be required from a resident governess.”

“Oh, indeed it is, Miss Forrester. My cousin, Lady Lemmington, has a little treasure of a Swiss woman who teaches French, music, dancing, the rudiments of drawing, and sees to Freddy and Algernon’s wardrobes. You will find dancing invariably required, or so much knowledge of it, at least, as to be able to prepare your pupils for the dancing-master.”

“Then I should be forced to confess my deficiency,” said Miss Forrester, quietly. “French,

music, and the rudiments of German and Italian, are my only accomplishments."

"Which of course must make your expectations very moderate as regards salary, very moderate indeed. Ahem ! . . . If—if—my own children are at present without a governess, Miss Forrester, my inestimable treasure, Miss Bailey, having gone away in a consumption, and what I was going to say is, that if you were willing to undertake their charge for a time, I should be glad to offer you a home. It is, I need scarcely say, a very easy place. My daughters being but ten and eleven years of age, and only two of the younger ones—boys—having as yet left the nursery. You would find them all delightfully-dispositioned children, and could keep as much to yourself as you chose, except at any time that I might require music in the drawing-room."

Miss Forrester slightly bowed, then turned her head away and rested her firm, square chin on her hand. "I must look irresolute," she thought ; "must mention money, or, fool as she is, she may suspect me of jumping at it too readily. Madame," aloud, "your offer touches me—the

more because it is made when I am in grief and alone—but I must tell you frankly I know nothing about the training of boys, and it would also be out of my power to undertake the charge of so many children without adequate remuneration.”

“ And pray what do you call adequate remuneration ?” asked Mrs. Fairfax, getting on her feet, as she found it “ told ” to do in shops at the more delicate crisis of a bargain. “ What do you call adequate remuneration, in addition to a comfortable home and the occasional advantages of society that I offer to you ? ”

“ I could not ask you less than thirty pounds a year, Madame. For society,” and she glanced at her black dress, “ I have no inclination whatever.”

Mrs. Fairfax’s heart swelled with triumph. The inestimable treasure had cost her fifty pounds without German or music !

“ Thirty pounds a year is a very large sum for such a governess as I require ; indeed,” making half a step towards the door, “ I don’t know, as your expectations are so high, there is much use



in prolonging our interview. If you were willing,—perfectly willing, mind, I don't press you, there are dozens who would be glad of the place—you might have the girls and Alic only. Dickey, dear lamb! as you've such an objection to little boys, should remain in the nursery for the present, and I would give you twenty pounds a year."

Miss Forrester hesitated; Mrs. Fairfax reconsidered; and finally each got what she desired: the rich lady, a dirt-cheap instructress for her children; the adventuress, a footing in the house of Henry Bryanstone's family. Dickey, dear lamb! was to remain in the nursery; and Miss Forrester was to receive the emolument of twenty-five pounds per annum.

"On the subject of religion and morality I think it well to be explicit," said Mrs. Fairfax, when the graver matter of money had been concluded. "You are not a Catholic, I presume, Miss Forrester?"

"Oh dear no," replied Honoria, readily; "certainly not a Catholic."

"Very well. Then you will take the children

to church on Sunday and communicate regularly yourself every three months. Have you any objection ? ”

“ Not the slightest.” But I will do Miss Forrester justice. She had not the faintest idea what she was promising. “ You will find me ready to follow out your domestic regulations in everything.”

“ And you will see that Sunday is strictly kept in the nursery. As you have been brought up abroad, I mention things I should not think it necessary to do to an Englishwoman. No toys, no idle conversation of any kind, and the epistle, gospel, and collect from each of your pupils.”

Miss Forrester bowed.

“ And you yourself, Miss Forrester—this is a delicate subject, but one on which I think it right to institute inquiries—are you, and I ask it solemnly, awakened ? ”

“ Madame ! ” and now Honoria’s hesitation was real. She had a vague idea that the question meant, was she wide-awake, and could not instantly resolve upon an answer, “ I—I hope I am,” was the safest thing she could hit upon ;

and Mrs. Fairfax received it with melancholy silence : shaking her head as though she would say that hope on such a subject was not worth much.

“I make a regular allowance for washing,” she continued, “and the school-room tea and sugar will be under your charge. Once a day at present, and twice in summer, you will accompany the children in their walk—and that brings me, I think, to the end of all I’ve got to say. You will, of course, receive no followers of any kind without my especial sanction, Miss Forrester?”

“Madame, I have none to receive.”

“And you can come to me at once—to-morrow afternoon, if you choose. That, I think, concludes our interview. *Good morning.*” She just touched Honoria’s hand with the tips of her fingers ; then swept the folds of her gorgeous skirt around her ; and rustled out of the room.

“And that is his sister!” soliloquised Miss Forrester, when she was alone. “That is a woman with money, position, character, home, husband, children. I’m better—I swear I am ! I could commit what she would call a crime and

faint at, but I couldn't grind down a wretched governess to the last penny, and seal the bargain with a text. No! Live with her? Not to win a dozen Henry Bryanstones. I'd get dangerous in such an air. I'd take her by the neck some day, when she was chattering in her stony voice, and looking at me with those brown-bead eyes, and stifle her—just for the fun of seeing how such creatures die. Three weeks, a fortnight will be long enough, with decent luck, for me to do my work. Then a grand crash, and Bryanstone, if he has any of a man's nature in him, must be on my side.

“At all events,” after a few minutes' pause, “luck is going with me now. I said unless I heard from Bryanstone I would leave London to-morrow. I have heard from him, and I remain. The first step is taken in earnest. By this time to-morrow I shall be under his sister's roof.

“And I did right to burn my letters, after all. That woman is capable of anything.”



## PART II.



## CHAPTER IV.

### A GOOD THING IN GOVERNESSES.

"Yes, poor thing, she's very plain, and there's something dull and depressed about her manner, but perhaps that'll wear off in time. On the whole, considering what creatures governesses are, I think I must thank you, Henry, for having told me of her. About her French accent there can be no mistake, and that, after poor old Bailey's Yorkshire, will be a great thing for the children. Yes, taking it altogether, and considering, above all, how plain and steady-looking she is, I do think this Miss Forrester is likely to suit me."

The speaker was Mrs. Fairfax; the scene her husband's smoking-room, to which, when no one was with them, Letty made it her habit to accompany him after dinner. "No one" was



with them to-day (that is to say, only her brother, Henry Bryanstone, and Laura Hamilton), and Mrs. Fairfax was just at this moment entertaining the little *partie carrée* with a lively description of Miss Forrester, the new governess, who had entered the house about three hours previously, and of her own great address and sagacity in the way she had engaged her.

“But I cannot think why you deceived me so about her appearance, Henry. You led me to think, somehow, that she must be so handsome, and when I saw her I really almost exclaimed. Straw-coloured hair, my dear Laura, cut short in front like a boy’s, and a waist—oh dear me—that would make up your waist and mine put together. Henry has the strangest taste in beauty, I must say.”

Laura Hamilton gave a little short laugh. “Mr. Bryanstone’s taste has always been for the blondest of blondes,” she remarked. “Do you remember Lulu Thomson? You and I, Letty, could never see any beauty whatever in her, and yet —”

“Lulu Thomson,” cried Bryanstone, taking his cigar from his lips, and looking round at

Mrs. Hamilton. "Well, hang it! give me my due and no more. Lulu was Richard's love from beginning to end, not mine. Richard, wake up," he went on, addressing a heavy peaceful-looking young man, with long fair whiskers, large white hands, and a scanty development of hair, who was dozing, a pipe in his mouth, by the fire. "Wake up, Dick, and answer for yourself. Was Lulu Thomson one of your loves or mine?"

"Lulu Thomson? why, mine to be sure," and Richard Fairfax opened wide a great pair of curiously-pale, china-blue eyes. "We saw her at the Sheffield races, you may remember, and got introduced, and I made all the running while you were showing little De Basompierre some of the amusements of an English race-course. What's up now? Letty, not jealous again, I hope?" And he held his hands high up over his ears, and looked at the little woman, who came about up to his elbow when they stood together, with the profoundest assumption of moral and physical cowardice.

Letty took it all with great good humour;

but in her heart registered one of the small oaths she never broke to repay her dear friend Laura for the speech. Jealousy was Letty's master-passion (next to meanness), and Mrs. Hamilton knew it, and had purposely mentioned the bitter sound of Lulu Thomson's name. But why had Letty dared to say before her that Henry Bryanstone had the strangest taste in beauty? I record these young women's feelings, and what they thought and said of each other, simply as these things arose. But don't suppose they were on any other than genial and excellent terms. They were the next best thing to friends that exists—intimate foes. A thousand common hopes, a thousand common rivalries, and the strictest, never-sleeping, armed neutrality had held Laura Hamilton and Letty together without one open rupture during the last three years.

"No, I was not very jealous of poor Miss Thomson," went on Mrs. Fairfax, playfully, "and I don't think I'm very likely to be so of Honoria Forrester. Richard, were you asleep when I was telling them about the children's new governess? She speaks French better than

English, and begins them in music and German, and she is a very steady-looking person, older than me, I'm sure, and very plain."

"That I quite believe if you engaged her for your governess. But—" and here Mr. Fairfax looked hard into the fire, and seemed to be bringing his brain up to the unwonted difficulty of struggling with an idea—"is this the girl that lived with old Mrs. Forsyth? Why, she's handsome—deuced handsome! Don't you remember, Henry, the night I saw her with you? She'd got Letty's box, hadn't she? Letty was in the country, and you and I—"

"No, no, no. You're dreaming, Dick!" interrupted Bryanstone, quickly. "You're thinking of Lady Augusta Bethel, the fair woman with short hair on her forehead."

"I remember her! Lady Augusta Bethel, of course," said Mr. Fairfax, who possessed the enormous advantage of looking a very much greater fool than he was. "Augusta and Honoria—well, they both end with an 'a,' don't they?"

Mrs. Fairfax looked up with her searching

brown eyes into both of their faces. "You are talking a great deal of nonsense to-night," she remarked sharply; "or I should *hope* it's nonsense. I should *hope* Henry never lent my box in my absence to any persons of objectionable character." Mrs. Fairfax's eyes flashed ominously.

"Objectionable character!" repeated Bryanstone, in his quiet way. "You don't mean to say you are taking a person of that sort to bring up the children? No, never mind, Letty," for the blood was in Letty's cheeks. "It's only Richard's nonsense—that horrid way he has of getting everyone into mischief. I know no more about Miss Forrester than you do, except seeing her a few times with old Mrs. Forsyth. You must have seen her, too, Mrs. Hamilton, a fair-haired or straw-coloured-haired young woman, as Letty says. Don't you remember her at the Armytage's theatricals?"

"I think I do," said Mrs. Hamilton, indifferently. "She paid a good deal of attention to old Sir John Armytage, if I remember rightly. Oh she *was* good-looking, Letty. Execrable

style, a third-rate French actress, but a decidedly handsome face."

Now Laura Hamilton remembered Honoria well, not only at the Armytage's theatricals, but on several other occasions ; at a flower-show ; in the park ; above all, on that night at the opera when Bryanstone had lent her Letty's box (for Richard's recollections were right), and on nearly all of these occasions Mr. Bryanstone had chanced to be at her side. With a spasm of jealousy she heard that Miss Forrester had gained access to the Fairfaxes' house, and to the constant opportunity of meeting Bryanstone ; a spasm of silent jealousy quite unlike what one of Letty's tornado gusts of that passion would have been ; a spasm of uncomplaining mute jealousy such as for years past she had been suffering on Bryanstone's account ; jealousy such as all women past thirty must, alas ! accept as their inevitable daily portion when they are fools enough still to regard a young, and sought after, and handsome man with sentiment.

And Mrs. Hamilton was a great deal past thirty, as much past it indeed as it is possible

for a woman ever to be ; and what is worse, looked her age, except under very exceptional and favourable circumstances indeed. Her black hair was rich and plentiful as ever ; her large, almond-shaped teeth were white as snow ; her hands and arms beautiful. For the rest, Mrs. Hamilton was a *passée* woman, and she succumbed to it, spoke of it, acknowledged her (approximate) age to you frankly, was genial in her manner to girls, a good comrade with men, and only accidentally, when some new infidelity of Bryanstone's was in the bud, or when Letty irritated her beyond endurance, ever launched forth into bitterness or detraction of any other woman's superior youth or looks.

She had been on the same terms of close intimacy with Henry Bryanstone for nearly four years. Deep in her heart, guarded jealously even from her own reason, there lurked the forlorn hope of some day marrying him. He had never given her the slightest foundation for such a belief, indeed to no other woman had he ever been so free in expressing the precise nature of his regard as to Mrs. Hamilton. "It's her

greatest charm," he used to say: "the one thing that prevents you tiring of her as you do of all the rest, she never degenerates into love-making." But not one woman in five thousand is capable, as nearly all men are, of friendship that can remain friendship. Not one unmarried woman in five thousand, whatever her age or appearance, is capable of close intimacy with a handsome and intellectual man, without some vain delusive *mirage* of marriage floating before her brain. Mrs. Hamilton had an unusual quantity of common-sense, and she understood Bryanstone thoroughly. She had not the slightest idea of his offering to marry her now; she knew indeed that such a thought had never entered into his mind; but what she did hope, what made her bear all his neglect with uncomplaining patience, wast his—that he would go on for another three or four years as he did now; go on until his last ideas of marrying, never very strong, were over, and then, some day, would discover that her companionship had become necessary to him, her faithful slavery a thing he could not do without, and so perhaps take



her, without any assumption of love whatever, to be his wife.

Among a certain class of women—good women, *au fond*, mind, they must be,—this sort of long-suffering, spaniel fidelity is not uncommon, especially for men younger than themselves. Some maternal instinct, that has never seen the light may be in its composition, and explain upon how scant a return such attachments thrive. If Mrs. Hamilton in her widowed life had possessed a child, I think she must have reproached Henry Bryanstone sometimes ; but having none, she just took him, faults and all, as mothers do, and made an idol of him. All indifference, all caprice, all absolute unkindness, all but his marriage ! she felt, in her inmost soul, that she could pardon him until seventy times seven.

But whatever her own secret hopes, her acquaintance generally were very far from sharing them. “ And I think Laura has a great deal too much sense to mislead herself,” Mrs. Letty, her most intimate friend, would kindly say. “ She and I are so fond of each other, that it’s very natural my brother should have got to like

her; but to think that Henry, *Henry* should ever dream of marrying a woman of her age, and a widow, too! and he can't bear widows. I'm sure dear Laura is far too sensible ever to entertain such an idea for a moment."

And with every imaginable variation, and clothed with every shade of scandal, from the most delicate suspicion to the broadest, unequivocal assertion, this opinion of Mrs. Fairfax went the round of all Laura Hamilton's female friends. Men had so long ceased to connect the thought of marriage with Henry Bryanstone, that they spoke of his intimacy with Laura just as they would have done if her husband had been still alive. She amused him, nothing more. Men, as a rule, are much less surprised at the power of a clever woman, no longer young or pretty, than women are themselves. For men know—as no woman ever can realise—how utterly powerless youth and beauty, unsupported by ability, are to enslave them for more than a month at a time.

And so the intimacy had lasted through all these years with every covert aid and abetment

from that profound little speculator on her own worldly interest, Mrs. Fairfax. As much as it was in Letty to love, she loved her brother. She was proud, that is to say, of his ability, of his handsome person, of his fortune, of his prospects. Some years earlier she had looked upon his marriage as a thing to be, and had even wished for it,—with some woman, of course, possessing rank and money. But as time wore on and Henry Bryanstone grew gradually to care more for the club and lansquenet, for Newmarket and Ascot, than for young ladies; as gradually his name began to be looked upon as scratched by the great heads of the matrimonial market, it was borne in upon Mrs. Fairfax to see how great an advantage her own children would derive from Henry's remaining unmarried.

His large fortune, inherited conjointly with herself from their mother, was absolutely at his own disposal, and her children were the only nieces and nephews he had. For one of the boys—Dick, poor lamb!—he had the strongest affection; indeed, when the little fellow's arms were round his neck, was wont quite seriously

to speak of him as his heir. Richard Fairfax at such times would open his blue eyes, and say: "Well, I like that. A boy of two-and-thirty, not my own age, talking about a sister's child being his heir." But Letty, who was never led into a joke on so sacred a subject as money, would only say, affectionately, she thought Henry likely to live until not only Dicky, but baby, too, were old, old, old men. In her heart she thought,—gradually of course; intense selfishness, like everything else, must have a growth,—“now that Henry has remained single so long, most likely 'tis for his own happiness he should continue so. Such a woman as he could love is not the woman he would ever marry. Everything is for the best.”

And under the influence of these optimist views; knowing, too, how great a safeguard against marriage is a house beside whose hearth a man may smoke his cigar unchidden; she encouraged his intimacy with Laura Hamilton as aforesaid. Under no other circumstances would she have allowed the world to speak of Laura as her own bosom friend; for Letty was not only

religious, but exclusive ; and Laura—well, Laura Hamilton's set was certainly *not* exclusive, and mustered twenty men at least, to every woman on its list. But maternal ambition will do much. Letty would have visited people much nearer the outside than Laura Hamilton, to secure an inheritance for Dicky. "And it saves Henry from worse," she would say, when inflicting domestic sermons upon her husband. "It's vile and wicked of you, Richard, to go about with Henry in the way you do, just as if there was no difference between a bachelor and a married man. But for him, poor fellow ! I make every excuse. Laura Hamilton is far from what I admire, both in herself and her friends, but I know very well she helps to keep poor Henry straight, and I am thankful to her."

Between Bryanstone and Richard Fairfax there existed a rare thing to see between men so closely connected—friendship. They had gone birds'-nesting together as little lads, for their fathers' estates lay side by side in Warwickshire ; had fought each other at Harrow ; had gone together through an Indian campaign, during

the short two or three years in which both were in the army. To look at the two men you would have pronounced them as opposite as any human creatures could be ; but they suited—does not that word, and no other, sum up all we know of love and friendship ? And the circumstance of Richard Fairfax, by order of both families, leading Miss Bryanstone to the altar, had neither at the time nor since abated one jot from the affection which bound him to his friend.

Possibly if Richard had loved, or pretended to himself that he loved, Letitia, he would have liked his brother less. No young married man very devoted to his wife, could well have fulfilled the part of Damon to such a Pythias as Henry Bryanstone. But Richard's orders had been to marry, not love, Miss Bryanstone the heiress, and he had held scrupulously to the bargain. He treated her very kindly ; went with her three or four times a year to church ; yawned through her grand dinner parties ; called her, and really thought her, an excellent little woman, and doated on his children. For the rest, Henry

and he just went on with their old lives very much as if no Letty existed to make them brothers. One of the amusements of Bryanstone's life, the passion of Richard's, was the turf. Bryanstone sometimes made a good thing of it, and sometimes a bad one; and once or twice in disgust had thrown up his stud for a year or two, and gone abroad, or gone in for other things. But Richard's profession was horse-racing. His innocent-looking face, and wide-open blue eyes, were as well known as the face of John Scott himself on every race-course in England. He gave up his money, his time, his abilities,—such as they were,—his heart, his soul, to horse-racing, and made it answer; just as the investment of money, pluck, and industry would have answered had he chosen to devote them to any other trade.

In the early years of their marriage, Letty, believing horse-racing to be ruinous, had made Richard's life miserable by her denunciation of it as immoral. As time wore on, and her husband's exchequer continued to be replenished, she got gradually more accustomed to what she

figuratively termed her "Cross;" indeed would go so far as to accompany him sometimes to Ascot and Epsom—with a bundle of tracts under the seat of the carriage for surreptitious distribution on the road—and enjoy herself immensely. The fact was, in her inmost heart she had grown rather to favour Richard's predilection for the turf than not. Putting money aside, which Letty never did or could do, his horse-racing kept him, as Laura Hamilton did Henry, from worse associates. Besides, were not the Duke of B——, the Marquis of C——, and Lord D——, all great turf-men, too? If a duke, a marquis, and a lord had been seen walking arm-in-arm on the high road to Hades, Letty would not have been quite sure that there wasn't a good deal to be said about the breadth of causeway and excellence of pavement along that well-frequented road.

"A third-rate French actress!" repeated Bryanstone, in answer to Laura Hamilton's last speech. "Well, I don't think Miss Forrester looks half as much French as English or German, with her large figure and light hair. Have



her down, Letty. Produce the chameleon, and set the matter at rest at once. Richard," Richard was asleep again, "don't you vote we have down the children's new governess?"

"Miss Forrester has already received my directions, Henry," said Letty, stiffly. "As only the Orr girls and the Dixons are coming this evening, I thought I would let her appear and play or sing, whichever she can. And I do beg you and Richard won't be unsettling her, either of you. If you do, it's the first and last time she shall be put in the way of temptation."

"Unsettling her!" cried Richard, innocently. "Good heavens! Letty, what a dreadful mind you must have! Did I ever try, did I ever wish to unsettle Miss Bailey? Now, I put it to you candidly."

"Governesses are not made of barley-sugar," said Bryanstone, sententiously; "and if they were, Richard and I are too old for unwholesome sweets. You needn't be afraid, Letty; the young woman won't melt away, and leave you without a governess the moment your husband

looks at her. Have her down here for a little to amuse us before we go to the drawing-room. I'm sure we want something enlivening if we're to go through three mortal hours of the Orr girls, and the Dixons."

"What, in Dick's own room, Henry? A young person in her position in a smoking-room? Laura, do you think it would be the thing?"

"Oh, I dare say Miss Forrester has no objection to smoke," said Mrs. Hamilton, demurely. "About propriety, dear Letty, you know you are such a very much better judge than I am in everything."

Mrs. Fairfax paused, considered, recollected a text—I mean a precedent, afforded by some person of title—Lady Anne Somebody used to allow the governess to come and talk German in the smoking-room; and finally dispatched a favourable ultimatum upstairs.

Three minutes later Honoria Forrester entered the room.

## CHAPTER V.

### LETTY FALLS IN THE FIRST ROUND.

SHE was dressed in a sweeping black moiré train, with a black velvet body, cut high and square as you see in the old Venetian pictures, relieved by a narrow stand-up frill of lace round the throat, and below the elbow by the wide-falling open sleeves of point lace. Her hair low down, as usual, in a soft misty cloud upon her forehead, with one long negligent tress falling down her neck, and the rest of its golden masses coiled round a jet comb at the back of her little well-shaped head. She wore no gloves, no ornaments, no fripperies of any kind. Only her black moiré, black velvet, point lace, and jet comb—and she looked superb so!

Richard Fairfax and Bryanstone rose instantly before the presence of the “children’s new

governess;" a surprised flush flashed across Mrs. Hamilton's dark cheek; poor little Letty very nearly screamed. Was this the plain, thick-waisted young woman she had seen arrive in a dingy merino and old straw bonnet, not three hours before? This magnificent, Juno-like woman, with her calm self-possession and marble throat and arms? What—*what* had she taken into the bosom of her family? Would Richard or Henry fall the earliest victim? and how—I will do Letty the justice to say that she thought this even in her first access of pious indignation—how soon, and by what means, should she get her out of the house?

"We have no party, Miss Forrester," and as she said this Mrs. Fairfax's eyes scanned, breadth by breadth, every morsel of Honoria Forrester's costly dress, and then informed the wearer, as plainly as eyes could speak, what she thought of it.

"So I was told, Madame," answered Honoria, deferentially. "Had it been otherwise I should have asked you to excuse me from appearing."

And as she spoke, she passed quietly on to the chair Richard Fairfax offered her by the fire, bowing with perfect ease to him, and also looking up for one second into Henry Bryanstone's eyes as she did so.

Her velvet and moiré had not been put on without profound deliberation. In acting all the scene over, as she made a habit of rehearsing everything, in her bed the night before, she had cast herself for the part of a poor, friendless orphan, weighed down with heavy crape and misery, on her first appearance before Henry Bryanstone at his sister's fireside. But, however finished her plans, Honoria Forrester was always ready to abandon them if any fresh tuition warned her to do so when the time of action came. The moment she breathed the atmosphere of Letty's house; the moment she saw the well-tutored little girls, the decorous women servants with white aprons, the library of theological books upon the dull, dark school-room walls, that sixth sense of premonition for which we want a name, told her that her stay would be brief indeed. On the plea of wishing

to unpack, she went to her own room at once ; and she was just kneeling beside one of her cases, wistfully looking at that very black moiré, and wondering if in this house it would ever see the light, when Mrs. Fairfax's request that she would come down to the drawing-room that evening, reached her.

"I shall be happy to do as Mrs. Fairfax wishes," was her answer, "that is, if it is not to be a large party."

"Oh, no party at all, miss," answered the under-housemaid. "Mr. Bryanstone dines here, and Mrs. Hamilton, and I think I heard Watson say one or two ladies in the evening."

"Thank you. Say to Mrs. Fairfax I shall wait upon her at the hour she mentions."

And then it was that the intention of plunging into the thick of the fight at once ; of donning, so to speak, her war-paint from the very outset, flashed upon Honoria's brain. The campaign *must* be short : live in this house : teach these children out of these books : why, a fortnight must see the whole farce out. She was playing to lose. As well let her adversary

see her cards as soon as they were dealt. If Letty was, by irresistible evidence, to be brought to consider her an impostor, why strive to propitiate her at all? Mrs. Hamilton, too (Honorina long ago had heard everything about her, and about her intimacy with Bryanstone) : would not both women equally, bitterly, be sure to hate her? Let them do so from the first. Put on her *moiré* and her velvet this very night. The men wouldn't know she was over-drest ; the men wouldn't know this was not the kind of black in which a well-conducted young woman should mourn her benefactress. The men would only note, as so many men had done before, how well the velvet and point lace and rich silk set off her lithe, full form and Rubens-like skin and hair ; and, as you have seen, she put them on.

“ Mrs. Hamilton, let me introduce Miss Forrester,” said Bryanstone, seeing that Letitia, with her little set teeth and angry brown eyes, did not look at all as though she wanted to make her new dependant at her ease. “ Richard, Miss Forrester.”

Honoria returned Mrs. Hamilton's cool nod with graceful gravity: at Richard, who straightway felt himself on her side, she smiled; and then she said one of those charming little nothings by which foreigners replace our weather statistics, looking pleasantly at Letty as she spoke.

Amidst the varied injustices of human life, nothing is more striking than the consistency with which people who are in the right have a knack of making themselves appear in the wrong, and *vice versa*. Letty was as much in the right as is a poor little virtuous hedge-sparrow in her own nest, who flutters up her feathers at that vile, audacious intruder,—the cuckoo,—who has surreptitiously made its way into the bosom of her own innocent flock; and the vile intruder, the unscrupulous adventuress, Honoria Forrester, was horribly, atrociously in the wrong. And yet to Henry Bryanstone's mind, and, worse still, to Richard's, it seemed that both Letty's and Laura Hamilton's manners were those of cold, disagreeable, fine ladies, setting themselves up against a poor dependant, simply because she happened to be young and



pretty, while Honoria struck them as the very model of what men like most in women—unaffectedness, good-humour, gentleness.

“I hope it’s not for me you throw your cigar away, sir?” she remarked, looking furtively up at Richard’s admiring eyes, when her little attempt at being friendly with Letty had fallen with dead weight to the ground. “I like the smell of smoking so much.”

“So do Letty and Mrs. Hamilton,” answered Richard. “Sensible young women, all of you. I threw the end of my cigar away, Miss Forrester, because I was just going to take another; and I’m glad to see you’re not one of those ridiculous women who pretend they can’t be shut up in a room with tobacco smoke. Stuff and nonsense, all of it! It’s only their husbands’ and brothers’ cigars that disagree with them. Any woman living could stand any conceivable amount of tobacco, provided it was her lover, or her friend’s lover, she wanted to win, who consumed it.”

“Richard!” exclaimed Letty, in a voice and with a look that told him plainly how indecent

such a strain of conversation was before a governess, "Richard, pray remember we are not alone, I perceive," she went on, coming up to time bravely; "I perceive that you are accustomed to the presence of gentlemen smoking, Miss Forrester, from your saying that you like it."

"Oh, dear, yes," answered Honoria, off her guard for once, or so wrapt up, as true artists will be, in her present *rôle*, as to forget some of those she had already played. "I am half-foreign, remember, madame; that must be my excuse, if anything I say is contrary to English taste. Monsieur, allow me; you are too far from the fire." And she took a paper match from Richard's hand, lit it, and presented it to him, with a little airy grace that at once brought Mrs. Letty's blood up to boiling heat.

"You may be half-foreign by birth, but I don't see how you can have been thrown into men's society during the last eight or nine years at least," she cried, savagely. "Two years you were with Mrs. Forsyth; seven years, you tell me, at a lady's school at Peckham. I should think neither of those were situations in

which you would have much to do with the smell of cigars."

The tone of Letty's voice was cruel in the extreme. Honoria looked at her for a moment, as though in silent surprise, then turned her eyes, suffused with tears, to Henry Bryanstone's face.

"I used to sit in my father's room when he smoked, Mr. Bryanstone, years ago, when I was a little girl in Paris, and once or twice in my holidays I've gone to France, and stayed with old friends, and got into their ways again; that was all I meant to say, indeed it was; and what madame remarks is only too true. My life for many years has, indeed, been one to make me forget all the likes and dislikes of my youth."

Then she stopped short.

Now, Henry Bryanstone was about the last man in Europe to mistake acting, however good, for reality. He had not at all a high opinion of Miss Forrester; was doubtful of her antecedents, her history, and everything else about her; knew as well as she knew herself that she

was posing for innocence at this very moment ; also, that his sister was a good little, honest, upright Pharisee, who had done what she considered to be her duty from the time she could run alone until now. But it is an instinct with most men,—with him it was a specially strong one,—to take part, irrespective of right, upon the weaker side. Whatever else Honoria Forrester might be, she was, for the moment, a dependant sitting beside his sister's fire-side (to which he had been the means of bringing her), with Letty asking her searching questions in a hard voice, and Letty and Laura Hamilton both looking at her as though her very presence was a contamination to them.

“ Hang women, and their fancies, and their hypocrisies, and their ways of torturing each other ! ” thought Mr. Bryanstone in his heart. “ I might have known what the fate of any pretty woman would be in Letty's hands ; but, as she is here, she shall not be bullied with impunity when I am by, at all events.”

And Mr. Bryanstone forthwith began in a low voice to converse with Miss Forrester concerning

Paris, Paris life, and her own recollections of them both.

("Turning her head from the very commencement, Laura, dear," Letty afterwards whispered to Mrs. Hamilton, on their way to the drawing-room ; " and she sat as if she had been an empress talking to her prime minister, looking at him through her half-closed lids, and babbling on her with silly French talk. Think what the effect of his attentions must be upon such a creature. *You* know, my dear, how fascinating Henry can be when he chooses!" For they joined issue, for once, in the presence of the common foe.)

"Can they be of the same flesh and blood?" thought Honoria, glancing from Bryanstone's animated face as he talked to her, to Letty's cold, little set mouth, and round, brown, cruel eyes. "Yes, the same lines are in both faces, only, for the moment, one is lit up by flattered vanity, the other under the charming influence of silent rage; the same lines in the features, and, unless I mistake, a good deal of the same relentless hardness in the character. If Bryanstone had been

duped, would he look as 'Letty' is looking now, I wonder? It is a speculation worth remembering."

And with one of her searching glances she scrutinised both faces again, dwelling so long upon one object at least of her scrutiny, that Henry Bryanstone, not ordinarily a vain man about his person, could not help feeling that the new governess's handsome eyes were incontestably taking notes of him.

"You must remember what her life has been, shut up with that old woman," he said when Richard chaffed him afterwards. "A gardener is not a gardener seen through the *grille* of a convent." But at the time he did feel flattered, nevertheless. Few men would not have felt flattered with Honoria Forrester's eyes telling him plainly that they thought him worth winning!

It was a language of which Henry Bryanstone had heard a great deal, translated into many tongues, and told with more or less outspokenness during his two-and-thirty years of life. Seven or eight years before, when he was in the

zenith of his first popularity among mothers and young ladies, he had been openly called the handsomest man in London. Worn and somewhat prematurely old-looking, as he was at present, women, in their hearts, still considered him one of the most irresistible ; though now that he had taken so fearfully to men's society, and had given up going to balls, it was no longer considered thoroughly correct to say so.

He was tall and long-limbed ; with a slight stoop about the shoulders, and a want of polish, amounting at times to open carelessness, in his way of walking across the room, holding a door open for old ladies, et cetera. So far not at all a drawing-room Apollo ; but Miss Eyre first revealed to us, and we have gone on discovering ever since, that women don't like drawing-room Apollos. His head was a beautiful head. In that alone lay a whole world of unlikeness between him and Letty : the head broad at the temples, upon which the iron-black hair was already thin, high, nobly receding and somewhat obliquely cut towards the back. The same clear-cut line of feature belonged to them both ; only,

while Letty's eyes were mere brown-bead, little common eyes, Bryanstone's were hazel-grey, deep-set and piercing; while Letty's continual smile was hard and unmeaning, Bryanstone's rare one was full of genial, almost tender sweetness. He was more close-shaven than men generally are now, except parsons or men connected with the turf. No moustache or beard hid a line of his handsome mouth or square-cut blue-black chin. And this circumstance, together with his great aversion to lavender kid gloves, dainty boots, and other amenities of civilisation, was one of the small "crosses" of Letty's life.

In matters of dress she could generally subjugate Richard; but Bryanstone was not to be altered from his own peculiar taste. "And it's shameful of you, Henry," Mrs. Fairfax would say when some of her best people, her cousin Lady Lemmington perhaps, or a great dignitary of the Church, had come in unexpectedly and found Bryanstone in a shooting-jacket and coloured shirt at four o'clock in the afternoon; "with your fortune and your position, to dress as you do! I declare I'd sooner see you plain in



face and exquisitely drest, than handsome as you are and drest like a Newmarket trainer. If you'd only wear your whiskers long, it would be something. As it is, you're no style at all, not even bad style. It's disgraceful before the servants."

But nothing, as I said, changed Bryanstone. "If a man is lavish of cold water and clean linen, it's enough," he would answer. "I don't go in for being a swell. Whenever I have to approach women of an evening I put on, as you know, a butler's suit, silk stockings, and a pair of gloves. In the day I am free, and wear whatever boots, hats, or coats I choose."

Even in the butler's suit—the most hideous clothing yet hit upon by our species—Mr. Bryanstone was handsomer than nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand men you meet. Honoria's eyes told no untruth. She really did think as she looked at him now, with the red fire-light shining on his face, that he was the handsomest man she had ever seen in her life, despite the family likeness to Letitia. She would have staked for him as boldly, have played her

game out as unshrinkingly, had he been sandy-haired and foolish-eyed like Richard. It was not in her to love, either with the heart or with the brain. She was simply bereft of that faculty, as a blind man of sight, or a gaudy passion-flower of odour. But the nearest approach to human affection which she did possess, insatiate personal vanity, was stimulated by the thought of conquering this man with whom so many women *must* already have failed. And unknown to herself, unacted for once, her voice did soften, her eyes sink as she sat beside him.

The conversation, of course, was by way of general; but you know how two women like Letty and Laura Hamilton, without positive rudeness, can crush another alien woman into silence!

"Yes, Paris is the one place in the world to live in," remarked Honoria, humbly, in answer to some speech of Bryanstone's; "above all for rich people. You have been there, I suppose, Madame?" to Letitia.

"Oh—yes;" the "yes" intoned. "Laura, dear, do you know the Windermere's have come

back? I met them yesterday, and Matilda is *so* gone off, and not at all improved by the ridiculous French way she drags her hair down on her forehead. Shall you call?"

"You ought to go to Paris oftener, Letty," remarked Bryanstone, when Laura had answered and thrown her little stone—a mere pebble, but which grazed nevertheless. "It would do you good, rub off some of your rust of English prejudices. Richard and I are sure to go over and see the Grand Prix run for in May. Suppose you come too. Miss Forrester could tell you where to get the best bonnets, and Lilian and Polly would be in raptures."

"I should like it very much," said Letty, amiably. She generally closed with any of Henry's offers of taking her about, even to wicked dissipated races; for he had a habit on such occasions of insisting upon paying all the expenses, besides making her and the children presents. "Wouldn't it be nice, Laura; you could come too? I long so much to hear dear M. Coquerel at the Protestant chapel again."

“But Lilian and Polly shall go, too,” persisted Bryanstone. “I should like above everything to have the children in Paris.”

“You think of them too much, Henry,” answered Letitia, “but that is a question impossible to decide now. In my present—ahem! unsettled domestic arrangements such a thing could not even be talked of.”

“Unsettled domestic arrangements?” cried Richard. “What does that mean, Letty? Are we to have another change of servants, or what? I’m sure I should think the present batch were starched enough to please you. If it was not for Tontin, I do believe the odour of sanctity about my own servants would stifle me. The women are bad enough, but Watson’s Pecksniffian face makes me inclined to use vile oaths every time I look at it. Tontin alone leavens the whole mass. Tontin is my French valet, Miss Forrester, the most awful little disbelieving reprobate you can imagine. He has lived with me, in spite of Mrs. Fairfax, for three years, and is studying English now for the sole purpose of converting the whole of the female servants to

Atheism." Honoria laughed (mentally how she held out her hand to Tontin ! how she liked, how she respected Tontin !)

Mrs. Fairfax rose, with an angry rustle of her dove-coloured silk dress. "It is time for us to go, Laura dear, I think, *quite* time," with a flash of her eyes at Richard.

She took her friend's arm ; and the two women marched away out of the room, leaving Honoria to follow as she chose. Was it to be expected that Mrs. Fairfax should step aside politely, and request the children's new governess to precede her ? Certainly not. But I cannot say I wonder that the new governess should turn back when she reached the door and look wistfully at the faces of Mrs. Fairfax's husband and brother, as though imploring them not to leave her long to the tender mercies of her mistress !

As Letitia conducted Mrs. Hamilton up-stairs at once, to look at dear baby asleep, and talk over the enormities of the black moiré, Honoria was spared the ordeal of being alone with her new friends. She had, however, to bear the side-long looks of the families of Orr and Dixon, who,

in great numbers, and in flowing white tarlatanes, were ushered into the drawing-room before Mrs. Fairfax had returned. Shortly afterwards the men, reinforced by one or two others, joined them; and Miss Forrester had no longer anything to fear. Regardless of the Miss Orr's artless charms and the Miss Dixon's syren voices—they stood in a row, drest alike, with downcast eyes, and warbled that lengthy ballad commencing—

Mermaids we be,  
Under the blue sea,

or something to that effect—regardless of these blandishments Bryanstone remained firmly by Honoria's side, and not all Letty's manœuvres, not all the looks of Laura Hamilton's dark eyes, could get him away from her during the remainder of the evening.

Miss Forrester was amusing: the first, essential quality that Bryanstone required now in a woman. She demanded none of the usual young-lady talk from him. She posed so admirably that it gave him pleasure to be able to think he

forgot she was posing. And besides, he knew the measure of the Orrs and of the Dixons so thoroughly! Their measure and their matrimonial intentions, too: and what was the use of him, Henry Bryanstone, talking to young women whose sole view of life was marriage, and who made no secret of their principles? If Miss Forrester had such intentions she did not molest you with them: and this in itself was a great merit. In short——

“In short she understands you, Henry,” said Laura Hamilton, as he was putting her into her carriage at Letty’s door. “Take care of yourself. With time and opportunity that woman could do with you just as she chose.”

Her voice was not devoid of a certain unusual tremor as she spoke.

“Could she?” answered Bryanstone, with one of his quiet laughs. “I think, Mrs. Hamilton, this is the most foolish speech I ever heard you make. Miss Forrester is a very nice person, as far as physique goes, and she’s new, and Letty bullies her. Besides, I had only the alternative of her or the whole galaxy of Orrs and Dixons.

For the rest, she's about as dangerous for me as—well as any of the other young ladies who are good enough ever to talk to me! Good night," holding her hand kindly in his; "I'm coming to dine with you to-morrow, if you'll let me. Gresham asked me, and I said I was engaged to you. What should I do, Laura, if I had not your house always ready to stand between one and being bored?"

But Mrs. Hamilton drove away with a colder shadow over her heart than any flirtation of Bryanstone's had ever cast there before. She was not jealous, like Letty, of Honoria's beauty; she was not offended by Bryanstone's tacitly ignoring her when he said he had only the choice of Honoria Forrester or of the Orrs and Dixons. Was she not accustomed patiently to be ignored by him? What she felt was rather an intangible dread, a superstitious shadow, such as old wives say men feel when a chance step crosses their grave. A quivering, a terror of the flesh, not unlike what a mother might be supposed to feel at the stealthy, unseen approach of some deadly reptile to the child



she loves. For women, being perhaps less humanised than men, retain many of those simply animal instincts still. And somehow instinct seldomer makes mistakes than pure reason in this kind of matter.

The guests all departed without Miss Forrester being able to steal away from the room ; and then, Richard having wisely followed Bryanstone to the club, she found herself *tête-à-tête* with Letitia.

Mrs. Fairfax's little face was set hard. She possessed, as she was wont to boast of herself, heaps of moral courage in "breaking things" to people, and had no intention of letting a night's rest cool down her wrath.

"You do not play on the piano, then, Miss Forrester?—may I trouble you to attend to me?" Honoria was examining the embroidered letters on her handkerchief. "You do *not* play on the piano, after all?"

Honoria looked at her quietly, full between the eyes, and Mrs. Fairfax, with all her courage, drew back a step. That look was, morally, what an unexpected blow, straight from the

shoulder, is to a man who has been bullying another, and thinking him a coward.

"I do play, Mrs. Fairfax; you mistake."

She had scrupulously called her "Madame" hitherto. Letty marked the difference, and knew that the gloves were off in earnest.

"May I ask why you would not play when I requested you to do so, then?"

"I have not touched the piano for weeks: I could not have played to-night before strangers."

"Oh—*in-deed*! Whatever the effect upon your own feelings, it would have looked much better before my friends if you had played, than kept as you did to Mr. Bryanstone's side the entire evening. I speak out, Miss Forrester, as I consider it right to you to do. Your manners, your—your—whole appearance this evening are not what I can approve."

"My manners! my appearance!" Honoria opened her eyes haughtily; then turned and looked at herself in one of the mirrors, as though to find out in what particular point she was obnoxious.

"Yes, your manner, your appearance. When

you lived with Mrs. Forsyth it may have been different. I know nothing about that. You seem entirely to forget what you are now, Miss Forrester, and the position you hold in my house."

"Pardon me, Madame!" her temper was admirable; "I have forgotten neither. I am a gentlewoman, and I have come here, by your request, to be the teacher and companion of your daughters."

The tears rose into Letitia's eyes; they always did when she felt herself getting beaten. "Don't talk to me in that sort of way, Miss Forrester, if you please. I am not strong, and I can't bear it." She had never had an hour's illness since she was born. "I'm sure I never was so upset in my life—so different to poor Miss Bailey; and you spoke so much about your domestic tastes and everything—and point-lace and moiré are *not* mourning!" concluded Letty, illogically, but with great animus.

The point-lace and moiré were the real drops that had made the cup to overflow.

"I did not know that you wished me to

appear in mourning," said Honoria, quietly. "I have heard that in some houses the dependants are not allowed to obtrude their private bereavements, and for that reason I put on other black. To-morrow I shall gladly return to my crape and merino; and also, if you will permit me, to the retirement of the school-room. Your painful remarks have shown me, Madame, the position in which you wish me to stand; and as long as I remain under your roof you will not, I trust, have to remind me of what I am again. Mr. Bryanstone had the kindness to notice me, and I confess I remembered only that he was a gentleman, I a lady, and forgot all the other inequalities between us. It shall be for the last time, Mrs. Fairfax. Good night!"

And having delivered herself of this oration, Miss Forrester, like an impersonation of injured virtue, walked with a firm step from the room, leaving Letty in tears, and more thoroughly beaten than she had ever confessed herself to be in her life before, by her own fire-side.

On the landing of the second floor Miss Forrester encountered M. Tontin, on his way from

his master's dressing-room; and as they passed each other the eyes of the new governess and of the French valet met.

"Sacristi!" exclaimed Tontin, mentally, as he stood and watched her go up-stairs; "where have I seen you before? Face, figure, hair, eyes, I know them as well as my own image in the glass!"

During his watch for his master's return that night, M. Tontin ransacked his brain in vain to recal where, and at what time of his sufficiently-varied life, this young woman's face had been familiar to him. That he had seen and known her he would have sworn, and this for the present was all. Whether in Saint Petersburg, Vienna, Paris, or Brest (circumstances had taken Tontin to Brest for some years), he knew not.

But Honoria Forrester never forgot a face, or the name that belonged to it. She had recognised, she remembered M. Tontin well.

## CHAPTER VI.

### RUBIES OR PEARLS.

IN the course of Richard Fairfax's toilette next morning, the valet revealed his suspicions.

"Oh, of course, Tontin," said Richard, "of course you know her. You, who know more than you ought of every pretty woman in Europe! Only keep your mysterious recollections to yourself, mind. The young person's position in the household wouldn't be improved by any remarks that you are likely to make upon her."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Tontin, with effusion, "I have never betrayed a woman yet. Although I have not the happiness to know who my father and mother were, something says to me, 'Tontin, you don't come of a race who commit petty *lâchetés*.' A crime, if you will, but nothing small or dirty: and to betray a

woman is of the smallest, the dirtiest! Their calling is to betray us—don't let us interfere with them."

Tontin was the household refreshment of Richard's life. He was privileged to say anything, either to his master or his master's friends; but, with the tact common to his countrymen, never passed the fine line that divides freedom from familiarity. Richard was wont to say of him that he was the greatest rogue unhung; and I really believe he was an extraordinary little blackguard (though, if you come to speak of unhung rogues, the subject is so large that to use superlatives in favour of one poor obscure French valet seems invidious). By Tontin's own account of himself, he had never had any particular chance of being anything but a blackguard. A boy who used to kick him with wooden shoes; an old woman whose plan was to strip him, and set him out in the cold, when he had not begged sous enough during the day; these were Tontin's earliest and sole recollections of domestic life. One day, when by inductive processes he concluded he

must have been somewhere about eleven years of age, the old woman ended her days beside a pan of charcoal, and was carried to the Morgue, where Tontin went to weep over her.

"I was a child, you see, and what will you have? I *had* called the old she-cat mamma!"

From this time forth he was enrolled in the great army of Paris gamins, with no particular lodgment or way of living, for more than four years. At the end of that time a hair-dresser took a fancy to his sharp face, and received him without wages into his shop.

"This man had genius," Tontin would say; "he must have had genius, or he would not have chosen me. By the time I was seventeen I was worth more to him than his foreman. Cutting, shaving, wig-making, hair-dressing,—everything came the same to me. I was the benefactor of that man and his whole family: I say it to this day."

"And the next little episode?" Richard would ask, when Tontin was narrating his memoirs. "That accident that took you to Brest for so many years, you know, Tontin?"



Tontin at this point invariably looked grave, as a virtuous man recounting his misfortunes might well be supposed to look; then he would put his ugly little head on one side and generalize. The curse of mankind, the bane of civilisation, had ever been, he averred, the unequal distribution of property. "Car voyez vous, Messieurs, j'ai beaucoup étudié moi. I know what is the history of our race. From my earliest days, before I could read at all, I was impressed with the monstrous injustice of the non-labouring classes being the wealthiest!" And so, finding himself in a position where his views could be reduced to practice, he, Tontin, used his humble endeavours to re-adjust the immemorial curse, in other words, broke open his employer's till, and absconded with its contents.

"I had laboured with that man for years, Messieurs; through me he had risen from a little shop in the Quartier Latin to a splendid establishment in the Passage Choiseul; through me his name had become great, his children were put forth in the world, and what was my reward? 'Tontin, good boy,' he would say, 'thou hast

cause to bless the day I saw thee. But for me thou would'st be on the streets still, more likely still at the galleys. Some day, Tontin, some day, I shall see thee yet at the head of a business like mine.' ”

But the day probably seemed too slow of coming, and, as I have mentioned, Tontin, in an evil hour, carried out into practice his democratic principles, and a thousand or so of francs from his master's bureau at the same time. He was caught on the frontier, and a judge, who had evidently not made the history of our race his study, found Tontin guilty, and sentenced him to his seven years.

“Read M. Hugo if you would know what I was at the expiration of my time, or rather read M. Hugo if you would know what an iniquitous human law tried to make of me ! Thanks to my *bon naturel*, Messieurs, I came out from the ordeal much as I entered it—much as I have the honour of standing before you now. There are some natures out of which the pressure of a corrupt and artificial society can never wholly crush all the good. Mine is one of them.”

If all this had been acting Tontin would have been wearisome; but he really believed in his own *bon naturel* as much as he did in his boundless conquests over the other sex. On the latter subject he was indeed inexhaustible, clothing his narratives always with that language of mysterious reticence which true men of honour affect when recounting their own successes, and not unfrequently giving you to believe that he had been forced gently to repulse some of his crowds of worshippers. At the time he entered Richard's service he called himself thirty-nine, but looked fifty at least (he had been living all over Europe, in all imaginable capacities, since the Brest injustice); and in addition to having lost his first youth, was of that inconceivable hideousness to which only a hideous Frenchman can attain.

"Un beauté de Vulcan" he would say of himself, glancing complacently across Richard's shoulder at his own wizened monkey-face and grizzled bullet-shaped head in the glass. "Mais que voulez-vous? Les femmes aiment ça. C'est appétissant!"

That every woman-servant in the household

flew before him as she would have flown from the incarnation of evil, was nothing to M. Tontin. "Monsieur," he would say, when Richard gravely questioned him as to this seeming contradiction, "I discourage them. I'm not a religious man, not a moral man, but I have my own ideas of honour. The females in Madame's employment are sacred to me as my own sisters would be. *Allez !*"

Although the well-known richness of Tontin's imagination in regard of women made Richard attach slight importance to his communications respecting Honoria Forrester, he did repeat it to Bryanstone the next time that her name chanced to be mentioned.

"Oh, of course Tontin knows all about her," said Bryanstone, carelessly. "I should like to see the woman he doesn't know all about. Do you remember that day in Paris when he came into the room weeping over a bunch of flowers because it was the anniversary of *her* birthday? 'her' being one of the prettiest actresses in the world, and a friend of our own into the bargain. By Jove, though, Richard!" he interrupted him-

self suddenly, and in a very different and in a much more excited tone, "have you heard the last news? 'Tis said, after all, that Buccaneer is not to go for the Two Thousand. Roger came up to give me some of his 'valuable private information' about it this morning, but I'm not at all sure of Master Roger, and haven't been for some time past. What the deuce does it matter to him whether we're sold or not?"

So do men pass unheeded the first creak that might have told them the bridge was broken over which they should walk to their doom. What had Henry Bryanstone to do with Honoria Forrester's antecedents. Was not the scratching of Buccaneer for The Guineas of very much more vital importance to him than the reputation of all the yellow-haired, white-armed young women in the world?

Meanwhile, though Tontin was silenced and Bryanstone apathetic, Miss Forrester had to hold her own as best she might against the combined forces of Letty, Letty's children, and Laura Hamilton; no contemptible alliance. Lillian and

Polly, young women of nine and eleven respectively, being by no means Letty's weakest auxiliaries on the occasion.

"I wish you to be very kind to Miss Forrester," she told her children, on the morrow of her own first defeat. "But you know, Lilian, what dear Miss Bailey's system was with you, and I expect you to report to me if Miss Forrester's is the same. Say nothing of the course of studies you have been pursuing, and tell me exactly the plan your new governess lays down for you."

And the trap was a well set one; and Lilian and Polly were quite able to fill the little parts entrusted to them; only, unfortunately, Miss Forrester happened to foresee it, and so was forearmed. On the first day after her arrival, the day on which lessons were to commence, Honoria came down an hour before the children were up, and carefully examined the books.

"All I want is to stay under her roof a fortnight," she thought. "Indeed, with such a shifty card as Bryanstone, the sooner I bring

everything to a crash the better. All I want is not to show utter incompetence—to have some faint idea what the children of such a woman as ‘Letty’ should learn at ten years old ! ”

She looked over the pile of books, geography, French, Scripture-history, grammar, and heaven knows how many other branches of learning besides ; and by dint of patient examination of pencil-marks on the margins, deduced for herself the approximate length of lesson into which Bailey had been accustomed to divide them. The next question was, did they learn a division out of each of these dozens of arid books every day ?

“I must take my chance of that,” Honoria decided. “Tell them I can lay down no rule until I have tested their powers of memory. They shall begin with something solid to-day ; the names of the Hebrew kings, now (whoever those old gentlemen may be,—they can’t mean, I suppose, the patriarchs of the Mont de Piété?), and the longest sums I can write on their slates. In the music I shall be right ; and by constantly speaking French and hurrying ’em straight from

one book to another I daresay we shall progress delightfully."

They progressed so well that when the studies were over Polly rushed off to her mamma to say that the new governess was a much, much greater Tartar than old Bailey, and never seemed to think they had done enough. But Miss Lilian, with two years' more knowledge of the world, tossed up her pretty face and said, that for her part she didn't believe Miss Forrester knew anything about teaching at all.

"And as to Scripture-history, mamma, she lost her place and couldn't find it, and while she was turning the book about, I said Jehoshaphat was the man who put his head on Delilah's knees, and she never set me right; and when we were doing geography and Polly said the King of Dahomey lived in Mesopotamia, she had to turn over the leaf to see before she corrected her. And that's true, mamma, and she doesn't like us or want us to get on. You see if I am right."

But though the children, with children's unfailing intuition, could tell that Miss Forrester



was not, and never would be, their friend; and though Miss Lilian daily amassed a heap of illustrative anecdotes like the foregoing ones, the new governess so unflinchingly held to her post beside the schoolroom table, that Letty, in her heart, felt it was impossible to find open fault with her as to her duties. She was punctual to a moment in her hours; daily walked with the children in the Square; spoke French unremittingly; went through the music-lessons with a patience and exactitude beyond anything Miss Bailey had ever shown.

“And still, Laura dear,” cried Letty, in the fulness of her heart, “still I know, as well as if an angel from heaven had told it me, that there’s something wrong. The woman’s acting a part, and getting a footing in the house, and I feel I’ve no power to turn her out. And what I like least of all is, Henry never mentions her name when he comes. That’s always his way when he’s thinking of anything in earnest, (don’t you recollect the time that you and I thought he’d forgotten Matty Brabazon?) and only this morning Dicky informed me Uncle Henry met

them as they were coming from the Square, 'and Mademoiselle told us we might take one more round with our hoops,' said my poor innocent, 'and while we ran Mademoiselle waited by the gate and talked to Uncle Henry.' Oh, if I only knew how to get her out of the house quietly! Money itself wouldn't stop me!" And to do Letty justice, she could give no stronger proof of her sincerity than when she thus invoked the name of her god.

Laura Hamilton and Mrs. Fairfax had seen each other daily ever since the fatal advent of Honoria Forrester. At the present moment the young women were taking their five o'clock tea, and talking over her iniquities together, beside Mrs. Fairfax's dressing-room fire. One of the staple miseries of Richard's existence, a grand dinner party at home, was to take place this evening; and while Letty poured forth her indignation against the creature in *moiré* who had inveigled herself under a pious roof like her own, her eyes could not but rest complacently upon the delicious mauve one, ready outstretched upon a couch, in which she herself would entertain

two bishops, a philanthropic and noble statesman, and several inferior scions of the nobility at her own table to-night. Mrs. Hamilton was not asked, of course. It was a thing dear Laura quite understood that none but the bishop's own set must be asked to meet him; and Laura submitted to the slight as she would have submitted to any slight whatsoever that had been offered her by a sister of Bryanstone's.

"You're certain you think mauve moiré and emeralds will look well together, Laura? Just hold a bracelet close to the skirt, while I look at it from the fire . . . well, I don't know, really . . . perhaps the rubies would be better, eh?" For Mrs. Fairfax was the veriest little Goth in taste; would wear diamonds with white muslin; emeralds with yellow silk; sapphires with black velvet; pearls of a morning. Perhaps rubies *would* be better!" and she put her head on one side, and looked with evidently favourable eyes at the hideous combination.

"I can't say that I call it correct, Letty, but then you know my taste is so quiet. Now how would your jet set look?"

“Thank you, Laura dear, my jet set, indeed! Why, I was obliged to wear it on account of Uncle Hugh’s death the last time the bishop dined here,—not but what I was sincerely sorry for him, poor old man, and he was quite prepared, and left the whole of his plate to Dick, we shall use it for the first time to-day. His lordship would think I live in jet! Dear me, how tiresome everything is! I don’t see at all why the rubies shouldn’t do. If they look well with white silk why shouldn’t they with mauve moiré? If that woman up-stairs wasn’t such a wretch, I’d send for her. The French understand these things, and I should hate the bishop’s wife to be able to say I was dressed in bad taste. Do you think now there would be anything in just consulting her a minute?”

Mrs. Hamilton thought there would be nothing at all derogatory in such an action for once; and after a great deal of discussion, and successively testing every jewel Letty possessed beside the mauve moiré, Valence, the maid, was summoned and dispatched for Miss Forrester.

Laura Hamilton had her own reasons for wishing to see the governess. She, too, had laid her little mine for that young woman's destruction; a quiet mine, of which she had spoken to no one; but which, had the match been properly applied, was a deadlier one, far, than any that Letitia unaided could have worked.

Miss Forrester came in, and gave her answer promptly. Rubies with mauve would be execrable. If Madame Fairfax chose she would look through her jewels and select the parure which to her taste would look the best.

Something; one can't call it magnanimity, perhaps, but something a good deal like to magnanimity; something large-natured, *quand même*! there was in Honoria Forrester's organization. She knew that both these women hated her; that she was walking, probably, into a snare at this moment; that by to-morrow, more likely than not, she would be turned out of the house. Under these circumstances, would some very excellent women have been able to resist the temptation of recommending the most

frightful combination of colours conceivable? Honoria Forrester felt no such temptation at all. For the moment, she was an artist; would have selected Letty's most becoming trinkets; have stayed and dressed her to the very best that was in her power. She was above this kind of retaliation. Perhaps, having a fixed purpose, good or bad, high or low, is the one thing that saves a woman from small and barren jealousies.

"Pearls; of course pearls go best with mauve," cried Letty, when Miss Forrester had so decided. "I wonder, Laura, you couldn't have thought of them when you looked over the case."

"And, if Madame would allow me to say so, some addition of white lace to the skirt—mauve never looks very bright at night—a robing brought up at the side, so, of point-lace, if possible, and terminating in a little knot of marabout feathers, thus. It could be arranged in a quarter of an hour."

The lace was produced; and assisted by Valence, Miss Forrester transformed the heavy

English-looking dress into an elegant Parisian one. Letty's heart quite smote her as she looked on, to reflect that Miss Forrester was not a young woman of strict principles. If she could only be convinced that Henry meant nothing serious she really was not sure she mightn't keep her yet. A lady's-maid at half Valence's wages would do with taste and ability like this to superintend.

"Pearls for the neck and arms," remarked Honoria, as she stood, her work ended, waiting for her dismissal; "and a lappet of white lace in the hair to match the trimming on the skirt. I hope Madame thinks her toilette well-arranged."

Letitia answered that it was so; not without the additional warmth of manner that a woman who is to shine before bishops must sustain towards the machine, animate or inanimate, that has assisted her to shine. And then Mrs. Hamilton felt that the moment had arrived for her to fire her little train.

"I saw Miss Richardson, yesterday, Miss Forrester," she remarked, without the slightest

note of warning whatsoever. "She talked of you a good deal."

Now if she had said Miss Fortesque, or Miss Allayne, or Miss Spearpoint, Honoria Forrester might then and there have betrayed herself. But, as it was, the very commonness of the name gave her time to think.

"Miss Richardson," she repeated, and horribly thick though her heart beat, her face gave no sign. "I know four Miss Richardsons, at least. Which of them do you mean?"

"I mean your next-door neighbour at Peckham. The lady whose house stood on the right-hand, as you entered, of Miss Jarvis's."

A house, like a person, once seen was photographed upon Honoria Forrester's brain for ever. In a moment, while Mrs. Hamilton spoke, the whole picture and environment of the Miss Jarvis's house rose before her, as she had seen it *once* in the indistinct twilight of a cloudy Autumn day. An old-fashioned, red-brick house, with trim gravel court in front, a small shrubbery on the right, as you entered, and close on the left, another and similar red-brick house.



"There was no house on the right as you entered Miss Jarvis's," and the enormous vantage of proving her adversary at fault gave her voice thorough steadfastness. "You must be thinking of some one else, I imagine."

Mrs. Hamilton thought over her words again, and the blood rose into her cheeks as she remembered that she was mistaken. "I—I meant on the left," she cried, "of course, on the left. Miss Richardson, who lived on the left, was talking to me about you, Miss Forrester."

"Ah. What did Miss Richardson, who lived on the left, find to say of me, I wonder?"

If the words were not an impertinence the tone was. Mrs. Hamilton's temper rose.

"She spoke of your habitual depression, of the way in which, for seven years, she used to watch you pace up and down one short terrace in the garden, until she fancied the grass grew worn with your steps. She spoke also of your ill health. Also of your appearance;" emphasized.

"Ah. It pleased her, I hope?"

"There was no question of pleasing, or not

pleasing, Miss Forrester. You must have been a very different looking person in those days to what you are now."

"I was so. I was over-pressed with work, badly dressed, wanting air and exercise, and in miserable health. Are there any other details concerning me, and me alone, that you seek to know, Mrs. Hamilton?"

"I seek nothing," answered Laura, coldly. "I know as much as I wish to do."

"That is fortunate. I excessively dislike being forced to speak about myself."

For a minute the two women looked steadily into each other's eyes: then Honoria turned away quietly; made one or two indifferent observations about the arrangement of the dress to Letty; and glided away, with her stealthy step, from the room. But her limbs felt heavy under her, as she made her way up-stairs again to her own.

"Tontin here!" she thought, "and this woman suspecting and tracking me! But for the blindest chance I must have betrayed myself. How shall I stand day after day, week

after week, of such an ordeal? As well bring it to a crisis at once—this very night, if I can. The difficulty will be how to court discovery, how to make yon little fool leave her bishops and her lords and come upon us! It must be left to chance.”

“Us” meant herself and Bryanstone. He had told her that morning he should steal away to the smoking-room after dinner, while Richard entertained the bishops over their wine. And Miss Forrester had not positively refused to meet him there.

END OF PART II.

## PART III.



## CHAPTER VII.

### A CHARMING PICTURE AFTER WATTEAU.

THE dinner was the greatest success Letty had ever had. A bishop on her right, a viscount on her left, another (colonial) bishop and several honourables lower down, a new accession of family plate on the sideboard, her husband and brother both conducting themselves with the strictest propriety, and talking Sunday-school talk to the bishops' wives, who would rather have had anything else, at the further end of the table.

Yes, but that the human heart is insatiate, and that Letty, being human, felt that archbishops and dukes were things still to be desired, this hour and a-half of pompous eating and drinking would really have been her *beau-*

*ideal* of enjoyment,—the ideal that some of us think is to be found in love, and some in present glory, and some in future fame. Was Letty so very much more mistaken than the rest of us? The puppets who peopled her Paradise at least were real; her plate solid metal; her bishops good meat-consuming heavy-weighing men of flesh and blood; and that is a great deal more than can be said of the visions that people the ideal worlds of wiser men.

When dessert was over, the wit and intellect alike of the lords temporal and spiritual fast lapsing into silence, Letty smiled meaningly at the bishop's wife number one, and the bishop's wife number one smiled at her; and then the colonial lady was glanced at (but with a tempered friendship, fit for a bishop's wife who was only colonial), and then the women rose, and Richard and Bryanstone were left to the ponderous occupation of entertaining the two churchmen, the philanthropic statesman, and a few imbecile young men whom Letty had picked up for the night, as women who go in for intellect will pick up stray writers or painters; simply on

the grounds of their being nephews or grandsons to great people, and so conducive to the general high tone of the party.

Earlier in his marriage, Richard Fairfax, on the occasion of his wife's entertainments, had been wont to conceive, in the innocence of his heart, that because men were serious men, bishops or otherwise by profession, their after-dinner talk would be of a character to match their calling ; and dreary and futile were the attempts the poor young fellow had made at different times in asking questions concerning Patagonian missions, tract societies, and the like. Broader experience, however, had taught him that the drinking of claret and hock is an employment wherein most men meet on common ground. Given, good wine, and the withdrawal of the women, and bishops, philanthropic statesmen, turfites and imbecile honourables, all enjoy themselves very much in the same way ; and if you will only let them alone, with very little outlay of trouble or speech upon the part of the host.

It was Richard's habit to go to sleep after



dinner ; he did so now, the men having drawn their chairs round to the fire ; mentally, at all events, whether he shut his bodily eyes or not. The philanthropic statesman began to converse with one of the imbecile men on the last turf scandal ; the bishop number one, received the confidences of another imbecile man as to his late success in potting African lions ; his colonial lordship planted two colossal feet on the fender, and imbibed his claret in peaceful animal enjoyment without talking to anybody ; and Henry Bryanstone, after a few minutes, stole away unseen from the dining-room.

Meanwhile Letty, up-stairs, had much harder work to do with the bishops' wives than had her husband with the bishops themselves. For whereas men only act before women, women act not only before men, but before each other. No standing at ease ; no hour of claret-drinking with feet upon the fender ; no honest discussion of the subject nearest their hearts, for them. The first bishop's wife was a great, white, obtuse woman, with a strong profile and a velvet gown, and who displayed extreme chilliness of

manner towards her colonial sister; a short, little, abrupt, sandy woman, who had had eleven (living) children, and liked to talk with great fulness of details over her experiences. And the only other woman present was the Lady Cassandra Peto, a withered branch of the peerage, whom Letty invited to all her parties, as she invited the imbecile men, because her name was written in the book, and who never opened her lips, except to eat or yawn, during the whole entertainment.

What was to be done with such materials? When the colonial woman talked, the woman in velvet shut her eyes; and when the woman in velvet talked, the colonial woman turned round, and began to give anecdotes about babies to Lady Cassandra, who, naturally hating babies and everything belonging to them, stared impatiently away into the fire, as though the subject was too disgusting a one to demand an answer.

“And I wish you were all dead!” thought little Mrs. Fairfax, as she smiled at them, and chattered at them. “What do bishops marry for, I wonder? That wretch in velvet, or the

other beast with her babies ;” mind, this is *verbatim* what Letty thought ; “ and you, you hideous old yawning, supercilious Cassandra, I don’t know which is the worst. But never mind, I go through it cheerfully. You can’t any of you say that my dress, and my rooms, and my dinner, and everything about me, isn’t perfect, you old cats ! ”

And then she fell, for the third time, to admiring the diamonds of the bishop’s wife number one.

This kind of thing lasted through the time-honoured hour and a quarter of torture so well known to British matrons ; then, one by one, the men re-appeared, and Letty was free again. Wine had so far unthawed the brain—let me be guarded—speech of one of the imbecile men, the lion potter, as to enable him to sink on the nearest sofa, and into a monosyllabic flirtation with Lady Cassandra. Richard, with the desperation of a man going to his dentist, charged at the bishop’s wife in velvet, and kept to her ; the other imbecile man fell an easy prey to the minor bishopess. “ Howid brute ! ” he explained

afterwards, "told me the way she dragged her litter of eleven—do you call 'em litters; though? I forget—thwough the bush, or acwoss the desert, or somewhere." And Letty was free to receive the attention of her bishops and her statesman to her heart's content.

She was so engrossed as totally to forget Bryanstone's absence. She danced hither and thither among her illustrious guests. She talked of earls and marchionesses, art and literature, Professor Jowett and the last conversion to Popery in high life, all in a breath. Her heart told her that she was now indeed reaching the crowning point of her ambition; was becoming the leader of a set; "one" in the exclusive ranks of London exclusivism. Richard's want of tone, and her brother's indifference to fashion, had been barriers against her progress hitherto; but to-night was, she felt, the inauguration of a series of unclouded successes. She had had "deans a many" at her table before; but never, save once, a bishop. And here were two, and a philanthropic statesman who *never* dined except in a certain set, and not another creature in the

room lower than an honourable. What a party to talk over with poor dear Laura to-morrow! What a party for that spiteful Cassandra to repeat to those horrid Lonsdales (after their impertinence, too, in presuming to leave her out of their last concert, making the insulting apology when they saw her next, that their rooms "were unfortunately not large enough for them to ask everybody"). What a delicious list of names to flourish forth in the *Morning Post* of to-morrow as the select party who had the honour of dining with Mr. and Mrs. Richard Fairfax last night at their residence in Chester Square!

Eleven o'clock came, and the carriage of number one bishop was announced. Mrs. Fairfax was descanting to him just then upon Art, of which she knew nothing, and going into raptures over every celebrated name that his lordship mentioned.

"Poussin?—oh, yes, Richard has got a charming little picture after Poussin. All court ladies and gentlemen, you know, sitting about under the trees in a lovely park."

The bishop thought the subject unusual for

Poussin. Could Mrs. Fairfax be thinking of Watteau?

"Oh, Watteau, of course," cried Letty. "I knew it was something of the kind. Is Watteau indeed one of your favourites? Then you must see this picture; that is, if you don't mind coming into Richard's den. He is so fond of the picture that he will have it hung where he can look at it as he sits and smokes his horrid cigars."

The bishop would be delighted to accompany Mrs. Fairfax to see the charming picture after Watteau, and the bishop's wife in black velvet would go too, and then the colonial people and the statesman joined; for men and women after a dinner party are only too glad of any excuse to get upon their legs; and finally, the remoter scions of the aristocracy, male and female, brought up the procession.

Now, only that Honoria was too wicked a woman to have her prayers answered, it really might seem as if the ardent aspirations she had been sending up during the last hour were bearing fruit. She longed for an *esclandre*—an

*esclandre* public, impossible to gainsay ; and lo ! Letty herself was bringing it about for her. Letty was bringing a host of her own best people to bear witness to the scene that it was Honoria's dearest wish should be discovered.

"I don't know whether there's a light," cried Mrs. Fairfax, tripping down-stairs before them. Richard's den was a small room, built out about half way down the stairs ; "if there is not, I'll have the gas lit in a moment. Pictures look so lovely by gaslight. This way, please."

And with the bishop at her side, and all the other people close behind, she pushed open the door of Richard's room.

"Oh, there is a light. Come in everybody. The picture is—is—is——"

The words died on Letty's lips ; her flushed cheeks turned to ice. Outstretched before the fire, a pipe in his mouth, was Bryanstone ; kneeling between him and the hearth, her handsome face upturned and close to his, her hands familiarly clasped upon the arm of his chair, Honoria Forrester.

No situation could be more compromising :

no situation more impossible to explain away. She, Letitia, had conducted two bishops and their wives, a severe statesman, *et omnes*, into her husband's smoking-room, and there, at eleven o'clock at night, was her own brother, making love, outrageously, to the governess of her children!

[Let me state, in justice to Miss Forrester's character, that Bryanstone was doing nothing of the kind. He was talking to her simply in the kind of half-flattering, half-cynical strain he always talked in to women—barring young ladies—and if Miss Forrester chose to kneel down on the hearth-rug instead of remaining in her place, he certainly was not responsible for the action. Probably she wanted to warm her hands, or show him how well she looked in the devotional or prostrate attitude, and with up-turned eyelashes. Henry Bryanstone was not a man to trouble himself much on such a matter; he really had seen a great number of pretty persons on their knees in the course of his life, and was not at all in danger even with Miss Forrester's white hand upon the arm of his chair.]



As soon as they had all entered, Honoria got up, and stood silently looking into the faces, one after another, of the whole party. Both the bishops thought they had never seen such a handsome young woman before in their lives. Bryanstone rose too, and laid his pipe down on the mantelpiece.

"You should have warned me, Letty," he began; but his voice was not thoroughly natural. "I had no idea you—"

"That is the picture," Letty interrupted; addressing the bishop and turning her back, dead, upon her brother and his companion. "I don't know whether there is light enough for you to see it well."

His lordship examined it, of course, and talked of the admirable grouping, and middle distance, and transparent shadows, and excellent half-lights; but still his lordship's eyes wandered to the living picture, the magnificently handsome woman, who stood, silent and composed, by Mr. Bryanstone's side.

As to the rest of the company, all of them well-bred people, it is not too much to say that

they stared as though they would never be sated by staring at Miss Forrester. The bishop's wife in velvet awoke thoroughly, for the first time since dinner, in her delight at being a near eye-witness of such a shameful and disgusting scandal—shameful scandals come so seldom near bishops' wives ! The sharp little colonial woman actually bristled, like a terrier who scents a rat, with interest. The imbecile men put up their glasses at Honoria, and tried to look feeble innuendoes at each other. But the conduct of the Lady Cassandra Peto was more wounding to Letitia than all.

This aristocratic and maiden bosom had long cherished malignant feelings both to Bryanstone and to Letty ; to Bryanstone for obstinately and consistently refusing to receive her attentions ; to Letty for having once beguiled away a prebend whom Lady Cassandra had looked upon as her own. Now was the moment of retaliation. Cassandra Peto did not stare at the disgraceful young woman or at Henry Bryanstone. She simply walked straight up to Mrs. Fairfax, held out her hand and said these words :—

“ Good night, Mrs. Fairfax. It is time for me to go.”

But the tone said, as plain as any words could have done : “ It is time for me, or for any decent woman, to leave such scenes of horror as these.” And every one of the company understood, as well as Letty did, what was meant.

Such an example is always contagious. In any crowd, in any unexpected emergency, it needs but for one human being, wise or foolish, to act, and every other human being there will feel it a sort of duty to follow him. It became clear at once to the bishops’ wives that it was time for them to go ; that Lady Cassandra was a discerning person, and that Mrs. Fairfax’s house was not the kind of house it ought to be. The bishops thought nothing at all ; but they followed their wives, and the rest of the men followed them. There was a simultaneous pressing of hands, a simultaneous wishing of good night—in tones more or less constrained or absolutely cold—and in another five minutes the whole of the guests had left the house, and Mrs. Fairfax, her husband, Henry Bryanstone, and

Honoria Forrester stood alone in the smoking-room.

Then Letty closed the door, and walked up bravely to Bryanstone. Her face was livid; her small features actually drawn and set with rage.

"Because I'm your sister, Henry, I suppose you think you can insult me as you choose."

Her voice was quiet and slow. Bryanstone had heard it like that once or twice before; once when she was quite a little girl and he had upset an inkstand over her new pink silk dress;—and knew that it was a sign of a demon rising.

"I'm awfully sorry, Letty, on my word I am, but how could I have an idea you'd bring those people here? There's not a bit of harm done, after all. Bishops don't faint at tobacco-smoke any more than other men. You brought your guests into Dick's smoking-room, and they found me smoking a pipe there before the fire. *Voilà*."

"I brought my guests into Richard's smoking-room," broke out Letty, vehemently; "I brought people of the highest position and principles into my husband's room to see a picture, and I found—what? At eleven o'clock at night you, my

own brother, carrying on a shameless intrigue with my children's governess. I say nothing to you, Henry. You have no religion, you pretend to none, and this is only of a piece with all the rest of your atheistical, Godless life. But you, Madam," and she turned, with her brown eyes ablaze, to Miss Forrester, "I desire to leave my house at once. Yes, this minute. What do I care where you have to go to?" for Honoria had stammered out something about having no friends. "You can go out upon the pavement at least. A much fitter place for you than the house of an honest woman."

There was a dead silence for a moment ; then Bryanstone spoke. His face had suddenly grown like Letty's—the same set lips, the same evil fire in the eyes.

"You'd better mind what you're about, Letitia. Take my advice, now, mind what you're saying. You'll repent this some day."

But Letty's passion, for once, had got the better of her prudence. She had been disgraced before two bishops, before a viscount, before that vile Cassandra Peto ! If Bryanstone had threat-

ened then and there to disinherit Dicky she would have braved him just the same.

"I think perfectly of what I do, Henry, and I will take the consequence of my act. That woman shall leave my house to-night, and you may get shelter for her or not as you choose. Go!" addressing Honoria. "I give you half an hour to pack up your clothes."

But now another voice struck in. Richard Fairfax knew Bryanstone's face well. He knew how implacable that easy nature could be when roused; knew that to take Miss Forrester under his protection, marry her, perhaps to-morrow, was just the kind of madness into which Letty's blind injustice might goad him. And besides this, Richard Fairfax would not have had a scullery-maid turned out of his house at midnight. If Miss Forrester had made love to both bishops at once, or stolen the family diamonds, or offered to elope with the viscount, or indeed committed any act of atrocity whatsoever, Richard would none the less have felt it his place to protect her from insult as long as she remained under the shelter of his roof.

“You’re an absurd little woman, Letty, you always were and always will be. There’s no harm done at all, that I know of, and it was all your own fault dragging those starched old buffers out of their proper place. Lord, I could die now when I think of Cassandra Peto’s face!” And Richard opened his great blue eyes innocently, and then went off into one of his peculiar fits of silent laughter.

Letitia ignored him and his speech alike. She ignored him so habitually in small things as to forget sometimes, when emergency came, of what kind of stuff Richard Fairfax was made.

“You will leave my house at once, Miss Forrester. If you choose it, I will order a cab to be called for you.” And she stretched her hand out towards the bell.

Bryanstone caught hold of her arm with a grasp of steel. “Before you call the servants to witness this lovely scene, Letty, I advise you again to pause. Miss Forrester is no more to me than any other lady. She came into the room, found me smoking, stopped by my request to talk to me, and for this simple cause you have

offered her the deadliest insult one woman can offer to another. If you go one more step I make her cause mine. Now, do as you like."

And then he unloosed her arm, took up his pipe from the mantelpiece, and made a pretence of re-arranging its half consumed contents. But his hand trembled visibly; Richard and Honoria both noted that it did so.

"I am not afraid of you, Henry," cried out Letty, with the pluck of a little wild-cat. "I am afraid of no one when I am doing what I know to be right. She shall leave my house to-night."

"Then, by God, she shan't leave mine!" exclaimed Richard—"I wish you were at the bottom of the sea," thought Honoria; "with your stupid English honour and rubbish you'll spoil everything yet!"—"You seem to forget, Letty, that I've something to say in the matter. Whatever you choose to do in the morning you may. I don't interfere with your right to do what you like then, and I have no doubt your justice will be tempered with mercy. In the meantime Miss Forrester shall not leave my house—no, Miss Forrester, not even if you wished it yourself,



you shouldn't. You may mount guard over her, if you like, Letty. Henry and I'll go out for the night, and even Watson too, if you prefer having no men in the house ; and you can summon all your women, each with a good book in her hand, and let 'em sit round in a ring and exorcise her. But Miss Forrester shall stay. I have spoken."

The tone of his bantering voice cooled Bryanstone wonderfully. Honoria saw that in an instant, and bestowed another internal benison on Richard.

"And I, at least, shall go off at once, Letty," he remarked. "I don't offer to shake hands with you in your present frame of mind ; but I think to-morrow you'll thank Richard and me for having given you a practical sermon on Christian duty. Good night, Miss Forrester : I regret, more than I can say, that any act of mine should have led you into such a ridiculous position. I shall see you in the morning."

He took her hand, and Honoria felt that his still trembled, and was cold. Did rage alone cause it to be so ? she wondered.

"Good night ! Mr. Bryanstone ; and thank

you for saying a kind word to me : I need it. Thank you, too, Mr. Fairfax, for not letting me be turned out of your doors at such an hour as this."

Then she turned away abruptly, with a sob, and left them all before Letitia, vanquished again, could get out another word.


Richard went down with his brother-in-law to the front door. "Sweet creatures women are in their vigilance over each other's virtue," he remarked, as Bryanstone stood silently lighting his cigar outside. "If we hadn't been there, Letty would have turned her into the streets without compunction. So much for handsome governesses. You don't mind being up early to-morrow, do you? I must be off to New-market by the first train."

"Well, I don't think I'm going," said Bryanstone, slowly. "I've been too seedy for the last week to venture standing about in this horrible damp weather ; and, besides, I've business in town. What's the good of my going?" he added, in answer to the horrified expression of Richard's face ; who would as soon have

missed his chance of salvation as he would have missed seeing the race for the Two Thousand. "You'll settle that affair with Townly for me just as well as I could myself; and, as I told you to-night, you may put as much money for me as you can get on the Wizard. The horse can run round the lot of them. Good night, old fellow! You managed Letty like a brick. Upon my word, if it hadn't been for you, I don't know what act of idiocy I might not have committed."

He shook Richard's hand with his usual hearty grasp, jumped into the Hansom that stood waiting for him, and gave the driver this address: Bruton Street, One-hundred-and-one.

Richard Fairfax went up to bear the brunt of his wife's temper with his mind at rest. He had old-fashioned, simple notions as to the efficacy of one nail in driving out another; and had no more fears as to Bryanstone's safety; for Bruton Street, One-hundred-and-one, was Laura Hamilton's house.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### MRS. HAMILTON DOES VIOLENCE TO HER PRINCIPLES.

HER small double drawing-rooms were furnished in the perfection of artistic taste. Women said that everything about poor Laura's establishment reminded them more of a bachelor's house than of a lady's presence,—the drawing-rooms especially. The men habitués of the house found those two little rooms the pleasantest of any they knew to rest and smoke and escape from boredom and be happy in. No useless work-tables, flower-baskets, foot-stools, or any other conventional drawing-room abominations encumbered the floor; card-tables, put away in recesses, served for the occasional requirements of loo or lansquenet: the rest of the furniture consisted solely of low divans, ottomans, and every descrip-

tion of easy-chair that it has entered into the heart of man to conceive. Three or four good pictures, one of them an original by Velasquez, were on the walls; on a Venetian console between the windows, the only work of super-erogation in the room, stood an exquisite copy in marble of Gibson's Venus. Books, that looked as if they had been read, stood on carved oak shelves on each side of the fire-place; a dog or two lay, generally outstretched, upon the hearth-rug; and the hangings of the room were in crimson velvet, cunningly relieved with white! *That* decided her friends, more than anything else, that dear Laura's rooms were unlady-like.

"With her dark skin, poor thing! no doubt crimson velvet was becoming; but who ever saw it in a drawing-room? Oil pictures, and that dreadful piece of statuary between the windows, were bad enough; but crimson velvet! It was easy to see whose taste had been consulted in the choice of such upholstery."

These rooms, whatever their faults or merits, were, as you may suppose, familiar and favourite ones to Henry Bryanstone. They struck him

with a welcome sense of peace now when, entering, redolent from the heavy dinner party and fierce after-piece at Letty's, he found Mrs. Hamilton quietly at work, her favourite dog Marcus, a setter he had given her, at full length before the fire, with one paw outstretched upon his mistress's dress, and his sleepy brown eyes lazily winking up at her face.

It was one of Bryanstone's weaknesses to like seeing women at their needle. Was the picture any less pleasant to him because Mrs. Hamilton had hastily hid away her novel and seized her work when she heard his cab stop before the door? Of course not. Men are never so much really taken as by *tableaux de genre* arranged expressly for their pleasure. Only that man is happiest who has an experienced artist, not a diffident beginner, to design for him.

She put up her hands, work and all, with a little gesture of surprise.

"Oh, Mr. Bryanstone, fancy seeing you now!" It required no very great stretch of imagination: twelve o'clock was not at all an extraordinary hour for one of Bryanstone's visits.

"You don't mean to say that Letty's bishops have gone away already?"

"Hang Letty's bishops!" was Bryanstone's answer. "Hang the bishops, and the governess, and the whole lot of them! I'm bored and out of temper, Mrs. Hamilton, and that's why I've come to see you. Set me to rights, please."

He passed her without offering to shake hands; drew a chair, but not his favourite one, abruptly up to the fire; and let Marcus thrust a wistful, fawning face against his hand unanswered. Mrs. Hamilton noticed each of these signs of abstraction, and went on placidly with her work. She understood him as only a woman who loves can ever understand a man. For her to have asked him another question would have irritated Bryanstone horribly. He wanted peace, silence, absolute attention, if he should choose to give her his confidence—nothing more.

"I suppose I may smoke?" he asked, after two or three minutes' silence: "or has dear Lady Somebody been telling you again that it

makes her faint only to go near the dreadful contamination of the window-curtains ? ”

“ I shouldn’t care very much if she had,” said Mrs. Hamilton, looking up with a quiet smile. “ Yes, Mr. Bryanstone, you may smoke. Get your meerschaum ready at once, please, and I will give you a light.”

And she rose, went up to the hearth, and, taking a spill from the mantelpiece, stood ready to light it for him.

She was not pretty—she was not young ; but in all Mrs. Hamilton’s smallest actions there was something indescribably gentle and subdued, something that made nearly all men for a constancy prefer her society to that of the women they were in love with. “ *Elle était plus femme que les autres femmes.* ” To one woman belongs beauty, to another wit, to another grace. It seemed her prescriptive right that men should come to her when all the rest of the world was going wrong with them, and be healed merely by the contact of her kindly hand, by the sound of her quiet voice, oftenest of all by her silence. Bryanstone had felt this subtle charm of hers



often, never stronger than he did at this moment, as she stood patiently waiting until it should be his pleasure to light his meerschaum, and let her return to her work.

“I never treat you as I do other women, Laura,” he remarked, at last; and, as he threw the match back to the grate, he took her hand, and held it, but for a minute only; “and I’ll prove it now by asking you to do something very disagreeable for me. What do you think has happened?”

Mrs. Hamilton could not tell. She returned at once to her place, took up her scissors, and went on placidly cutting out her embroidery. “Something to do with horses?” she suggested, with a little short laugh, for in her heart she was strangely nervous concerning this coming confidence. Bryanstone had said, “Hang the bishops, and the governess, too!” He ought not to have cared enough for the governess even to wish her hanged.

“Horses! If it was only that, you would not see me out of temper, I think. No; it’s nothing to do with horses—it’s Letty. Letty got in one

of her tantrums with the governess to-night—the new, light-haired young woman—and dragged me into it: that’s all.”

“The governess appeared at the dinner-party, then?” asked Mrs. Hamilton; but she laid her work down now, and looked full into Henry Bryanstone’s face. “Why, I was with Letty just before dinner, and Miss Forrester helped her about her dress. They were friendly enough then.”

“Oh, no, no!” answered Bryanstone, promptly. “The fact is, I got away to Richard’s smoking-room after dinner, and the governess came in to look for one of the children’s samplers, I suppose, and stopped a little while; and then, what should Letty do but marshal the whole of the party, the bishops and their wives, and old Cassandra Peto and all, straight into the smoking-room? I believe they came to see one of the pictures. What they found was—Miss Forrester and myself! You may imagine the rest of the scene.”

Mrs. Hamilton was silent for some seconds, then she spoke thus :

"And Letty is going to turn the woman out of the house, I suppose? If she does, she acts right. I would do so myself. Miss Forrester is not a proper person to be there, and you know it."

"I?"

"Yes, Mr. Bryanstone, you know perfectly well, in your heart, what kind of woman Honoria Forrester is. You are not finding it out for the first time now. You know very well you had begun to run after her even while she was in Mrs. Forsyth's service."

"I know that you are all deucedly down upon her!" cried Bryanstone, hotly, "and I know she has the misfortune to be handsome. For the rest, I neither know nor care one jot about the woman, only as I got her into the house I don't mean to stand by and see Letty grossly unjust to her without interfering. As to running after her while she lived with Mrs. Forsyth, I suppose I saw her in all about six times. Once I got her a box at the opera, yes, and took her there; I remember you seeing me do so. On another occasion I believe I walked with her at a show of

some kind in the Regent's Park; twice or thrice I dined in her society at Mrs. Forsyth's, and there's the extent of the 'running after.' I didn't know," he added, rather bitterly, "that *you* were going to take up any of Letty's puritanical opinions. You have never gone in for that kind of thing hitherto."

The hot blood rose to Mrs. Hamilton's face; her lips began to tremble.

"I am never puritanical," she said; "I never go in for religious hypocrisy of any kind, and you know it, Mr. Bryanstone! If Miss Forrester did not come near any one . . . had no bad intentions towards any friend of mine, I mean . . . I shouldn't trouble my head to think whether she was good or bad."

"And what friend of yours is she coming near?" asked Bryanstone, opening his eyes in unfeigned astonishment. "Towards whom has Miss Forrester these sinister intentions?"

"Towards you."

"Me!" He jumped up; stood for a minute or two with his back to the fire, and then burst into a laugh. A laugh whose thorough hearti-

ness might have swept away any suspicions, save those of a jealous woman. "May I ask what her intentions are, Laura?—I beg your pardon for calling you by your christian name, but you know I always do it when you say anything very ridiculous,—felonious or honourable? do they tend towards my plate-chest or my affections—or both?"

"Both," said Mrs. Hamilton, sententially. "Honorina Forrester intends to become your wife."

Now, if Henry Bryanstone had heard that Miss Forrester had intentions upon the crown of England, the imputation would not have seemed to him more simply preposterous than did this. Just as a man who has kept out of debt for several years might feel a sheriff's-officer's hand upon his shoulder without recognising the meaning of the grasp, Henry Bryanstone had kept out of matrimony until he had literally no matrimonial instincts, I mean no natural terrors in regard to young ladies, left about him. Miss Forrester was a very pretty woman, and she had been flirting with him: had presented him with a bunch of violets in Chester Square that very

morning ; had met him by appointment in the smoking-room ; had knelt with her supple white hands artistically clasped upon the arm of his chair. What next ? Well, Letty had treated her in the usual way women treat each other, and he had come to the rescue ; possibly, if Richard hadn't interfered, and Letty had turned the girl out into the street, might, in his rage, have committed some egregious act of folly that he would have repented of afterwards. And out of materials such as these Mrs. Hamilton's brain has chosen to evolve—marriage !

He put down his meerschaum and came over to her kindly. In his soul no man ever likes a woman less for her entertaining foolish jealous fears of him.

“ And you think I'm in danger ? ” he asked, bringing a chair beside hers. “ You think, at my age, thirty-three next November, Miss Forrester's yellow hair and white arms will be too much for me ? ”

“ I think,” said Mrs. Hamilton, “ as I said before, that Honoria Forrester means to marry you.”

“And you think me in danger?”

“How can I tell? She is a handsome woman, and you are at least receiving her attentions. What took her into Richard Fairfax’s smoking-room at all?”

“To look for one of the children’s books.”

“It was a sampler just now. Tell the truth, Mr. Bryanstone. She met you there by appointment?”

“And supposing she did, which I am very far from allowing, what of it? and what worth is all your long knowledge of me,” he went on more seriously, “if you can even suspect me of falling into such folly? If I had been going to marry I should have married long ago. But I am not—as I think I have told you some few scores of times since I knew you first.”

“Most men say the same,” remarked Mrs. Hamilton, making a pretence of taking up her work again; “and most men who say it end by falling into the first palpably open scheme that is laid for them. Why shouldn’t you? You are vain. You are indolent. You have an immense opinion of your own strength. All

qualities to strengthen the power of a woman like Honoria Forrester over you."

"Speak plainly, Laura. Am I a fool?"

"Well—no—I don't think you are."

"Then, please don't talk to me any longer on the subject of my matrimonial dangers. A man of my age and of my pursuits who would surrender his liberty is a fool, unless of course he believes his love for the woman he marries will be sufficient to make up to him for the loss of his old life. This, you see, never can be my case. As much of that kind of thing as it's in me to feel I expended when I was a youngster. Very likely it wasn't the real thing (that novelists write about, I mean); but I thought it was, and, at all events, it was all I could feel, and I've never had any return of it since. With the solitary exception of yourself—and you are a good comrade, you rank among my men friends—I have never known any woman, since that first one, of whom I wouldn't be sick in three weeks. Of Miss Forrester I should have quite enough in three days. She wouldn't even amuse me if I lived under the same roof with her. So



much for marriage. Now for a different subject, and for common sense. Through my instrumentality the young woman was taken into Letty's house, through my fault Letty is going to turn her out of doors to-morrow morning. I can't look on quietly and not interfere, and if I do interfere I shall get into a scrape. And I don't want to be in a scrape. I want to lead a peaceful life, go over to Paris by-and-by with you and Letty and the children, and be off for grouse-shooting in Norway with Dick and Lauderdale in the autumn. Help me out of it, Laura! It was to ask you to do so that I came here now."

Her embroidery swam mistily before Laura's eyes. Never had Bryanstone's manner been kinder to her than at this moment; never had he been more cruelly explicit as to the nature of their friendship. A good comrade, ranked among his men friends. Well, better have him so than not at all. Better be his friend, his comrade, than one of these women whose beauty could win him for three weeks, or three days; and yet—and yet Laura Hamilton was a very woman, with all a

woman's vanity, with all a woman's jealous craving to be loved, not liked. She forced her tears back; long habit had taught her this accomplishment when she was with Bryanstone, and answered calmly that she would do anything he wished. Go to the house; intercede with Letty; see Miss Forrester; try to get another place for her—anything.

Her voice was husky as she spoke, but Bryanstone never noticed it. He really was quite interested about Honoria, and felt it a sort of point of honour that her character, such as it was, should receive no injury at his sister's hands.

“As to interceding with Letty, it's no earthly use, Laura. She would not listen if both her bishops asked her to behave justly to Miss Forrester. The thing is, to provide the girl, half-foreigner and friendless as she is, with a roof to go to. If Letty had turned her out, now, I daresay I should have offered her my little place in Piccadilly.” (Laura's heart turned sick.) “I could commit any act of insanity when I'm in a rage, which is about once in seven years; but

fortunately, Richard saved everybody, like the honest fellow that he is ; and if you'll be good-natured, I shan't have anything more to say in the matter. Just ask her to spend a little time with you, and everything will be right."

Then Laura's work fell in her lap.

"I can't do it," she cried, with a gasp ; "no, I can't ; it's too much !"

"May I ask why not ?"

"Because my instinct says no," she cried, almost passionately,—"because in my heart I believe her to be an adventuress—an impostor. No, I don't talk moralities," she went on, as Bryanstone was about to speak ; "I don't go in, as you reminded me, for piety ; you don't need to say that again. I would take in—I have done it already—a miserable, God-forsaken woman from the streets, and shelter her, and try, if I could, to start her again with a better chance in the world. But Miss Forrester—no !"

"Because, I think you said you believed her to be an impostor. Am I right ?"

"Because I believe and know her to be one," she answered, quickly. "I didn't intend to tell

you, but, as you force it from me, you must hear it. Honoria Forrester has not led the life that she pretends to have done. From the first day she came to Letty's, I disbelieved all that story of her being for years in a girls' school; disbelieved it so much, that one day when—when I happened to be at Peckham, I set myself to work to inquire about her. The Miss Jarvises, by an odd chance, had lived next door to the house where my business led me, and I heard just as much as I chose concerning them. The school was broken up, and the Miss Jarvises had left the place, but my informant remembered the French governess who lived with them for years, and described her to me."

"Well?"

"And it was not Honoria Forrester, Mr. Bryanstone; that is all. I was told of a pale, silent young woman in ill-health, and of a melancholy disposition, and who never went outside the school gates except to church. She spoke with a strong French accent—Miss Forrester does not—and her hair was red, not yellow, not golden. The person who told me this had seen

her scores and scores of times, and was not to be altered in her evidence. Now, what do you think ? ”

“ Just as I thought before,” said Bryanstone, somewhat obstinately,—“ that the girl shall not be turned out of Letty’s house without some one ”—he laid an ominous emphasis on the word—“ finding her a shelter. If she never lived at this school—if she is an impostor—an orange girl from Covent Garden—I say the same.”

He rose to his feet, and Marcus ran to the door, as though sensible that his old master was going to leave. There was dead silence for some minutes ; then Laura Hamilton cried, with a sort of gasp, as if the concession had been hardly wrung from her ;

“ I believe you are right. Whatever she is, the blow ought not to come from Letty. Yes, I’ll ask her, Mr. Bryanstone. I’ll go to-morrow morning and bring her away with me, if you think it best.”

It was a tremendous victory,—a victory not alone over vanity, jealousy, pride, but over something stronger even than this—her instinctive

dread of Honoria Forrester being brought near to Bryanstone. She had made many unselfish sacrifices for him at different times, for all of which he had been grateful. No sacrifice had been at all like this one, and he received it as a matter of course; nay, rather as a matter of right,—an act of common justice.


“I was sure you would take the common-sense view of the matter,” he remarked, presently. “What does it matter whether the girl lived at a school or not? From her general style I should myself be doubtful as to the whole of her antecedents; but what have you and I got to do with her antecedents? To take away the character of a woman in her position is to take away her bread, and we won’t let it be done even by Letty. What time will you fetch her? I don’t envy you your task of having to face Mrs. Fairfax.”

Laura hesitated still. “I suppose it’s absolutely necessary to do it to-morrow? You know I have a few people to dinner,—you and Major Chamberlayne, and little De Basompierre——”

"And Farnham Lumley," added Bryanstone, quickly. "Yes, I remember; and I think you could not do better than let Miss Forrester make her appearance. Some of these fellows might take a fancy to her for ought you can tell."

"Farnham Lumley, for instance," hazarded Mrs. Hamilton. "He admires that coloured hair." She was sore, bitter at heart, and could not resist the temptation of saying this. A moment afterwards she would have given all she possessed to recal her words. Bryanstone winced as if he had been stung. His face grew not pale, but livid,—awfully, ghastly livid, to his very temples.

"I know nothing of Farnham Lumley's tastes," he said, quietly, after a minute's silence; "but, if Miss Forrester was a thousand times worse than you and Letty think her, she would be too good for him. Good night, Laura." He took her hand with quite his accustomed gentleness. "I don't think you'd give me the small stabs you do sometimes if you knew how much I think about her,—I mean about my poor little sweetheart still."



And then he left her.

“That is the coloured hair Farnham Lumley admires :” the hair of his poor, little, first, dead sweetheart.

The words rang through Bryanstone’s heart again and again as his cab drove him to the Carlton.

Little did Mrs. Hamilton know how strong a card she had played that night into her adversary’s hand.



## CHAPTER IX.

### DER DEBENSMAI !

RATHER more than eight years before this, when Henry Bryanstone was still under five-and-twenty, he first saw his "poor little sweet-heart," Lady Sarah Eversholt.

It was at a country village feast, and Lady Sarah, not yet out, and in a plain muslin frock, was helping the rector's daughters, with whom she was staying, to cut up plum cake and pour out tea and coffee for the National School children. Bryanstone fell wildly in love with her on the spot. She was a tall, delicate-featured girl of seventeen, with great, frightened-looking hazel eyes, a colourless, shell-like skin, and short pale hair, clustering, like a boy's, about her little graceful head. There was more

of sweetness than of intellect on the low soft forehead, and the retreating form of mouth and chin was one which, in women even more than in men, never fails to indicate a character at once affectionate and unstable, confiding, unreliable, cowardly. The most fatal type of all for producing misery to all other stronger natures with whom it may come in contact. But Bryanstone saw, either then or afterwards, no flaw upon his idol. He had just returned, badly wounded, from India; his right arm was in a sling still; his handsome, bronzed face, thin and worn from the effects of his recent wounds. And before the day was over Lady Sarah Eversholt's girlish fancy was won.

Then began that idyl without an end, so trite to all others except the two who for the time are believing the eternal falsehood to be truth!

Bryanstone's place was about five miles from the rectory, and every day during the next four weeks he spent, on some pretext or another, with Lady Sarah. It was June, and her mother—a pretty woman of six-and-thirty—was only

too glad, for many reasons, to have her eldest, but not introduced, daughter safe away from her side during the perils of the London season. It was June ; and among the silent clover-fields, with Bryanstone's arm to lean upon, and the music of Bryanstone's wooing voice in her ear, Sarah Eversholt's heart was awakening into as much passion as her childish nature was capable of. Not a very profound one perhaps, if we do right in gauging the emotional by the mental capacities, which is not certain ; but deep enough to last out, and to embitter, all her own short life.

From without there was nothing to check or hinder the first chapter of the romance. The rector's daughters, who knew nothing of the family intentions respecting Lady Sarah, took it for granted that Bryanstone, young, well-born and rich, would be considered a fitting match for their friend ; and Sarah, led away first by his handsome face, and afterwards too much in love and too much afraid to speak, never gave him the faintest hint of her hand being already promised. Only when she parted from him,

to go back to her father's house in Leicestershire, that poor little hand lay strangely cold and trembling in his, and a wistful, piteous entreaty was in the tone with which she begged him to let their engagement remain a secret; begged him not to write to her parents or to her until she had tried to bring her mother round to listen to his suit.

After a week's torturing suspense a letter from Leicestershire reached Bryanstone; a letter not directed in the unformed schoolgirl hand he knew and loved. It was from the Marchioness of Eversholt: a delicate, well-expressed composition, thanking Mr. Bryanstone for the high compliment he had paid them, and informing him that her daughter had been engaged for nearly two years to Mr. Farnham Lumley. Lady Sarah's extreme youth and shyness must be her excuse if she had in the slightest degree concealed the true state of the case from Mr. Bryanstone.

Engaged to another man—this girl in whose eyes was the very incarnation of truth! whose lips, as he believed, had given him their first

childish kisses, their first stammering words of love !

He gave himself one day to think. [To this hour he remembers every trivial detail of that day well ; remembers how he watched the changing mosaic of sunshine on his study carpet, as he paced restlessly up and down all through the never-ending summer afternoon ; how he listened, hour after hour, to the chimes from the distant minster ; how he talked patiently to his steward about some improvement on his land ; yes, even to the precise trees that he desired should fall—he remembers all !] The next morning by the earliest train he started for M——, Lord Eversholt's place in Leicestershire.

The Marquis was not at home ; and Lady Eversholt would receive him. She was more than courteous ; she was almost affectionate in her attempts at lightening his disappointment. Was not Bryanstone a man of good fortune, both present and prospective, and had she not four younger daughters, none of them as pretty as Sarah, to dispose of ? But he was not, even

at four-and-twenty, a man to be influenced by soft words. In vain the astute woman of the world pleaded her daughter's youth as her excuse for having encouraged his attentions ; in vain she recounted the various obligations under which she stood of becoming Farnham Lumley's wife. Political connections, family ties, the Marquis's word of honour, dearest Sarah's extreme inexperience. All explanation fell with the same dull lack of interest upon Bryanstone's ear. At the end of an hour, and when Lady Eversholt had in the best manner said everything that the best breeding or policy (the same thing) could dictate, he made this solitary request—to receive his dismissal from Lady Sarah's lips.

“It is due to me,” he said, simply. And Lady Eversholt, touched by his handsome face, and not wishing to lose him altogether, knowing too that, with ductile material like Sarah, the game must be to the strong, consented.

It was an interview of half an hour, an interview in Lord Eversholt's library, but as solitary as any they had ever had in the fading night

amidst the clover fields. Need I enter upon its details? The passionate protestations from a woman too weak to hold to them; the silent bitterness of a man too strong to utter much complaint. The scene has been enacted until its very name is trite! Before they parted, Sarah Eversholt, with a sob, fell upon Bryanstone's breast, and swore that she would never marry another man than him; and Bryanstone in his heart—but loving her as much as ever—knew that the promise, like all the old ones, would be good just as long as he was there to hold her in his arms.

He received two or three loving, entreating letters from her afterwards; then, suddenly, through quite an indifferent source, he learnt that Farnham Lumley was staying at M——, and that his marriage was to take place immediately.

When it came to this, he felt that he must see her once more; he believed in the report of the marriage, thoroughly, mind, and wrote openly to ask this of her. "Not even alone," he wrote; "in the presence of her mother, if she

would. But he must see her—say good-by to her for ever.”

The answer was quite a genuine one. Lady Eversholt never even knew of it, he found out afterwards; and it was all blotted and erased with Sarah's tears. She would see him—she would see him—and he must save her yet! The marriage could not be. Bryanstone must save her, if it was at the very altar, from the horrible guilt of marrying Farnham Lumley. She would see him on a certain day, at a certain hour, in her father's house as before, and she was his till death, Sarah Eversholt.

He went to M—— on the appointed day, and at the appointed hour, and as he drove along the avenue to the house caught sight of the ghost of Sarah Eversholt's face, as it whirled past him, in a travelling barouche at Farnham Lumley's side. She had been married to him by special licence that same forenoon!

Had she indeed meant, as she had written, that Bryanstone should be in time to save her at the altar? or, feebly false to him, as she had already been to Lumley, was this last, supreme



betrayal intentional, a device to keep him on to the very last, and at the same time spare herself from having to confess her own frailty? Bryanstone never asked himself a question respecting her. She was gone—the driver of the carriage pulled up as they passed the bridal pair, and volunteered information of the wedding—gone! In the possession of Farnham Lumley! And he was a fool, idly staring after the lost face of the woman who had jilted him.

He turned back to the station at once; came up to London that evening, and during the few remaining weeks of the season lived at the [kind of pace very young men do take when they want to live down their own capacity for suffering. At five and thirty a man must be a fool indeed who should spend his money or risk his health for any woman's falseness. Youngsters throw away both; just as a child in his passion throws away good meat and bread and butter because it is not the sugary indigestible lump of cake he coveted to possess.


And for a man of four and twenty the process—set up by nature—is not without wholesome,

curative results. On the morning of Sarah Eversholt's marriage, Bryanstone was a boy, with a boy's fresh hopes, a boy's belief in the truth and goodness of women. When he met Lady Sarah Lumley in town next spring, he was a man of the world; and whatever danger there might be in the renewal of their intimacy, there was no longer any danger of *his* being befooled.

They met; and in a month Lady Sarah's weak heart had fluttered back to its old allegiance. She had never loved Lumley; but she had succumbed, passively, to being his wife; had really tried, for her own happiness' sake, to put away the image of Henry Bryanstone from her heart. If she had never met him again, possibly she would have got on as well as the majority of other young married women; have taken a lukewarm sort of interest in her house and dress, and visiting list, and partners, and have forgotten, at the end of a year, the better world upon whose portals she once stood, blushing, among the clover-fields, with Bryanstone's arm about her waist in the hawthorn-scented

nights of that dead June. . . . But they did meet—do not those people always meet who had better remain apart?—and before a month was over her unstable heart had remembered its old affection, and gone back, as far as in her lay, to its old allegiance.

Too weak in every exigence of life to take upon herself any burthen that might be borne by another, Lady Sarah never strove to hide from Bryanstone that she was miserable in her married life. She had borne Lumley's neglect indifferently, at least, hitherto. As soon as her old lover's presence re-awakened in her the old sense of being loved, she felt the sting of it bitterly. How different her life would have been with the man who, in spite of her betrayal of him, was still her slave! still admired her more than all the prettiest women in London! How exquisitely happy those country meetings of a year ago were! how much better than the glare and fever of this London season! Was it not good to recal them still? Did it not refresh her wearied heart to talk to Bryanstone? Had she not a right to consider him her greatest



friend, one to whom she could unburthen her troubles, and from whose strong mind she might take counsel? Were the father and mother who had sold her to Lumley as near to her as him who had first tried to save her, and now had forgiven her her cruel treachery to himself?

Now Bryanstone was no longer boy enough to believe such an intimacy as this could be carried on long without danger to himself. He also rated Lady Sarah Lumley's stability of character at about its due value. But he loved her still: loved her, perhaps, with the obstinacy of a man who, in his inmost heart, knows the unworthiness of his idol; and neither from Farnham Lumley nor from the world did he attempt to cloak his regard for her. However it might all end, he knew already that he would be the greater sufferer: most of all if the weak woman he loved should be thrown upon his protection for life. And still towards this end he walked on, straight and unwavering, just as eighteen months before he had ridden into the ranks of the Sikhs in India—just as when he was

a little lad he would walk unbidden up to his father or tutor to receive any promised punishment that he had incurred.

The world looked on and said that Henry Bryanstone was a fool, and that Lumley, tired already of his high-born wife's insipid face, was deliberately shutting his eyes to his own impending dishonour. But the world, as regarded Lumley, was for once wrong. He had wearied of poor Sarah's insipid prettiness before he had been married to her a week ; he treated her as it was in his nature to treat any helpless creature, woman, child, or dog, that happened to be in his power. The political reasons for which he had married the Marquis of Eversholt's daughter were no less cogent now than on his wedding-day ; nor was Lumley, a man without birth, pushing his way up to power, likely to court the exposure of a domestic scandal. Simply out of ignorance of what she did, and where she went, he had not interfered up to a certain point in his wife's growing intimacy with Bryanstone. On the first day that his friends whispered to him what was going on, he took steps of his own

to put an end to it. Decisive steps that attained their object thoroughly.

That night Lady Sarah Lumley went to a great ball, given by Bryanstone's old regiment, who were then stationed at Hounslow [he remembers accurately how his poor little sweetheart looked that night, in a pale shining blue dress, and with a single water-lily in her flaxen hair]; and, contrary to his custom, Mr. Lumley attended her. Just because he did so, Bryanstone made his attentions more open than usual: right or wrong, it was his way to do whatever he did in this kind of desperate fashion: and everybody who saw Farnham Lumley as he stood, white with rage, watching them, knew that a *dénouement* of some sort was approaching fast.

Bryanstone himself believed that Lumley would insult him; and under this belief took care, after handing Lady Sarah to her carriage, to stand for a minute or more with his back directly turned upon her husband, who, livid with suppressed passion, stood waiting to follow her. The impertinence was so obvious, that he

almost started with surprise, when Lumley immediately afterwards wished him a civil "good night," shook hands with him, and then took his place by his wife's side.

He understood the man's nature better when two days later a blurred note from Lady Sarah summoned him to meet her early in the morning in Kensington Gardens. "It was to be a farewell," she wrote, "for Mr. Lumley was going to take her abroad for an indefinite time." I say, he understood when he saw her why Lumley had not insulted *him*. She was white as death; older by ten years than when he danced with her two nights before in her shining dress and water-lilies; and when she threw back her veil he saw a cruel blue mark darkening all one temple and delicate wax-like cheek.

What he said to her—what projects he formed for her during that last short interview, only Henry Bryanstone knows. A week later a singularly calm, happy letter reached him written from Paris by Lady Sarah. She was very ill, had grown too weak even in these few days to go out. The doctors talked of a great shock she

had got, and how the heart's action was impaired, and how rest and nourishment and her own youth would, they hoped, have power to restore the equilibrium in time.

"But I am dying, Henry," she wrote ; "dying, and so glad to die ! I haven't the right sort of character for life, or for making anybody happy. But it makes me glad to think no woman will ever be as dear to you as I, with all my faults, was once."

Happily for them all, for himself most, her own foreboding proved true. Sarah Lumley died ; and in her grave was buried all the remaining youth of Henry Bryanstone's heart. Men found him wonderfully little embittered when, the first shock over, he began to mix with them again. He had not done with life, or the common interests of life, in the least ; only one portion of his nature, his capacity for love, was dead. He made no secret of this. As time went on he fell gradually into the life of other men of his age and position, and the world thought how utterly Lady Sarah was forgotten. But no woman was ever deceived by Henry



Bryanstone. To any young girl who showed a preference to him he invariably, and at the outset, announced his intention of not marrying. To women past five and twenty he would say, "I admire you—shall continue to do so perhaps for a year, perhaps for a week, but it's not in me to love you, or any other woman. Elect for yourself whether you'll have anything to say to me or not."

And they did elect: and, till he tired of such a life, grew more and more prone to men's society and less to balls, no man in London was more run after than Henry Bryanstone. But he was true to his own words; true, as men understand fidelity, to the dying hope of his poor little sweetheart. No woman *was* dear to him as she, with all her faults, had been once. To no woman did he ever mention the word love after her death.

"Very likely I don't know what the real feeling is," he would say sometimes, as you have once heard him say to Laura Hamilton; "but whatever I can feel of that kind I have felt. Life is very desirable without sentiment. People

who like without loving are happy as long as their liking lasts, and part without pain. Why should we want more?"

So much for the lover's fidelity. The husband married again at the end of a year and two days: those two days are important; they form the sharp demarcation between indecent haste and absolute decorum. And this time Mr. Lumley got the worst of it in his household arrangements. Lady Sarah's successor was again a woman of rank (with his hundred thousand pounds and ancestry of cotton-spinners, birth was of course the first thing Farnham Lumley looked for in his marriages), but not again a wax-faced trembling girl, to receive a blow mutely, and die under it. She was a very beautiful woman of eight and twenty, the daughter of a poor Irish peer; took Lumley, not pretending love for him, but simply and openly that his money should be the prop of her father's falling house; and within a year from her wedding-day she left him. He tried his best for a divorce, but came out from the trial with his character infinitely more damaged than

his wife's, and bound not only to be in fact her husband, but to support her still.

Both men and women, I will say, kept clear of him after this second and worst scandal. But what calamity, social or moral, is there which the irresistible buoyancy of money cannot recommend to the charity of society? At the time this story commences, Lady Sarah's grave in Père-la-Chaise was moss-grown; and the second wife, taken back by her family, was expiating her follies with prayers and fasting in a convent; and Farnham Lumley was member for L——, and very well received and thought of by most of the "best" people in London. His wine and horses were irreproachable. His place in Leicestershire was the best bachelor's country house going. And, though this affected women only, it was credibly reported that his wife's lungs were damaged.

But it is one thing to be well received in the great world, and another to be liked there. Lumley had associates, sycophants of both sexes, by the score. No woman ever loved him: no man ever called him his friend. For a black-

guard to be liked, he must have personal advantages ; a handsome face, a genial manner, a hearty grasp of the hand ; and making the most of these, he will perhaps get on better than a truer man while he lives. But Lumley's physical and moral nature were honestly of a piece. To no woman could his white lymphatic face grow tender ; to no man could his halting, suspicious manner unthaw. He could give you excellent meat and wines ; he could not be hospitable. Men might possibly get stupid drunk ; they never warmed into conviviality at his table. If you rode a horse of his, you felt the odds were you would lame it, and make an enemy of Lumley for life, or else be brought home with your own neck broken. Of all the names he was ever called, from his cradle to this day, you would undertake to swear that the commonest one of all, "a good fellow," was never applied to him. No one, in the memory of man, had ever patted Lumley on the back. The large majority of men called him "Mr." Lumley when they spoke to him. No little child ever ran up and touched his hand ; no dog

ever crouched unbidden at his feet. I find myself describing him by negatives; and it really is negatively that a character like Lumley's must be considered. Was he dishonourable, cruel, false, cowardly, profligate? None of these things were more directly proved against him than against other men: indeed, barring those few unpleasant facts that had come to light during his second wife's trial, no absolute scandal of any kind had ever arisen against Lumley. He was member for L——; he entertained; he was received. And yet—and yet, as I have said, no woman ever loved Farnham Lumley; no man ever called him by the name of friend.

Between him and Bryanstone there slumbered an enmity, only the more dangerous because it was carefully masked, at least on Lumley's side, by a studied semblance of forgiveness and good faith. Soon after Lady Sarah's death her husband, while sorting away her jewels, ready for any future wife, came upon a small packet of letters, carefully tied up and stowed away in the secret drawer of her trinket-case. They were

very short notes, signed by "Henry Bryanstone," and most of them consisting of this sort of matter: "Dear Lady Sarah," or, a week later, "My dearest Sarah,—May I be at the Rectory at six this evening?" Or, "I send you the book I promised, but you will see me in the course of the morning." Or, "Could you and the girls walk by the river this evening? I am ashamed to come to the Rectory more than six times a week." These were the country notes; and one or two country mementos, a leaf or two of myrtle, the petals of a dead white rose, lay among them. Then came three or four, written in much fresher ink. Very courteous; very cold; the mere notes of ceremony which any man may write to any woman in the world; but upon which Lumley, with the knowledge he believed himself to possess, could put any construction he chose. Lastly, carefully inclosed in paper, a little lock of hair, jet-black and curling as Henry Bryanstone's hair was in those days, with a date, and the initials "H. B.," written in Lady Sarah's schoolgirl hand on the paper that enclosed it.

Farnham Lumley kept all these proofs of his dead wife's infidelity: it was a rule of his never to burn anything that might compromise another; never to write anything that might compromise himself: and when he met Bryanstone in London, a week or two later, held out his hand to him in the street.

In the first access of his passion at knowing the outrage to which Lumley had subjected the woman he loved, Bryanstone had sworn to himself to horsewhip him, like a dog, in the first public place where he should happen to meet him; and if any other chance than death had stepped between them, I have no doubt whatever that he would have fulfilled his oath well. Living, Lady Sarah was a woman to be avenged, to be saved, to be loved. But dead—what was she dead? Lumley's wife, Lumley's slave, no longer: but rather his, Henry Bryanstone's, poor little sweetheart, a girl wandering with him in the clover-fields with the setting sun shining on her happy face: a bright-haired vision of all the youth and hope that were dead to him now, and for ever! Dared he, by act or word, bring the

chance of shame upon the memory of his buried love? Was it not the least sacrifice he could make for her to receive Lumley's outstretched hand, and so leave the world in ignorance of the last dark miseries of Lady Sarah's life?


He took it—'twas the hardest deed he ever brought himself to do while he lived—and Lumley, reading his face thoroughly as he did so, hated him as only a coward who knows himself to be at once despised, but unchastised for a woman's sake, can hate.

This all happened about seven years ago; and during these seven years no word of ill-will had ever passed between Lumley and Bryanstone. They met not unfrequently, for Lumley was pertinaciously civil both to Mrs. Fairfax and Mrs. Hamilton, and Bryanstone being much too *laisser aller* to interfere, both these young women—like all other young women in London—were quite ready to receive his attentions and invite him to their parties. Sometimes, but rarely, Lumley even dined at Bryanstone's own house.

And at heart he loathed him more than at the



moment when he first read his love-letters to the woman whom his own brutality had murdered ; —at heart swore still to be revenged blackly, trebly on him when the time should come. Bryanstone, after his first outburst of passion had cooled, would no more have stooped to injure Farnham Lumley than he would have stooped to injure a groom whom he had turned out of his service. But Lumley was a man who neither forgave nor forgot. His anger never blazed. His revenge could keep at steady white heat for a dozen years. Had he loved Lady Sarah himself, had there been a leaven of natural human passion in his hatred for her lover, he would have been a safer man. It is when a man of his stamp simply thinks he has been outwitted—in love, cards, horses, no matter what—that his revenge is the most inexorably bitter. He, Farnham Lumley, had been outwitted : deceived into buying a damaged article at full price ; into marrying, with large settlements, a woman whose heart belonged to another man ! And sitting at Bryanstone's table, or meeting him as a friend among men, one un-



wavering determination never quitted that cowardly heart. To sell him even as he himself had once been sold. For this he would have spent thousands; for this he would have given the best years of his life; for this he would, almost, have incurred the risk of personal danger. Would his hour never come? Would no tool ever be found to his hand? He had waited seven years in vain; and now——

Now Honoria Forrester was about to be introduced to him.

END OF PART III.

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## **PART IV.**



## CHAPTER X.

### HONORIA'S OATH.

As soon as Letty had said her prayers on the succeeding morning to the dinner-party, she began to see it was well that she had not turned Honoria Forrester out of the house. The situation was quite bad enough, without converting it into a public scandal. She could go round to her friends now, and say she had been disappointed in her governess, but had treated her with leniency, poor thing! as Christian charity bade her do; could smooth the whole thing down to Henry; get Miss Forrester away quietly; pay her passage to France, if needed, and then turn the whole idea of his flirtation and of the discovery made by the bishops into a joke. Yes, it was a thing to be

thankful for that that vile old Cassandra would have no more scandal to repeat than this, that Mr. Bryanstone had been found with the governess in Mr. Fairfax's smoking-room. And when Laura Hamilton, soon after ten, made her appearance and explained her mission, Mrs. Fairfax, you may be sure, threw no difficulties in the way of Miss Forrester's quiet and immediate departure from the house.

"Only take care you don't have a repetition of it all in yours, Laura," was her parting warning. "My own duty, as a Christian, demands that Richard and I should see the creature into proper hands before giving up our protection over her, but as a friend I warn you what you may expect. Tell her from the first how many days she may stop, and whatever you do never leave her alone with Henry. I'm not quite sure I should trust her too near your jewel-case. A woman who's bad in one thing, only wants temptation to be bad in all."

In which Letty was wrong. But how can you expect one poor little woman to be at once worldly, orthodox, and thoroughly read in

human nature? On the whole, Letty talked nonsense seldomer than half the clever people one meets.

"I'm not afraid of my jewels," said Mrs. Hamilton, carelessly; "and I think Mr. Bryanstone quite able to take care of himself. My fears, if I have any, lie in quite another direction. Farnham Lumley and one or two other men dine with me to day, and of course Miss Forrester must appear. Nothing would annoy me more than for a girl of her description to get up a flirtation with a man like Lumley in my house."

And then, having told their respective little stories, the friends parted, and Mrs. Hamilton went up to the school-room to extend the gracious offer of her roof to Honoria Forrester.

Honoria was quietly removing her few possessions from the school-room shelves when Mrs. Hamilton entered. She received her invitation coldly, and without surprise. In her long watches of that anxious night she had turned over every possible plan that Bryanstone could



think of for her, and, with instinctive knowledge of his character, had hit upon this very one of enlisting Mrs. Hamilton's sympathy as the most likely one for him to adopt.


"If he makes her do it it looks well," she had decided. "It looks like what such people call honour. It points to marriage. If he proposes anything else I shall start for Rome to-morrow, leaving my lord to follow or not, as he likes. If the woman invites me, I will go there."

She stood up, cold, formal, but perfectly civil in manner before Mrs. Hamilton. "Madam," she remarked, "do I understand you rightly? You offer me the shelter of your roof?"

"I do," answered Laura. "I know that you are parting unpleasantly from Mrs. Fairfax. In order that you may look about for another situation, or communicate with your own people, I ask you to spend a week with me."

"In what capacity, Mrs. Hamilton?"

Mrs. Hamilton looked confused. "As an acquaintance, of course," she answered, but not without hesitation.



“ My reason for asking is quite a simple one,” proceeded Honoria. “ I know very little of English customs and of English ladies, and you must pardon me if I shock your ideas of good breeding. My experience in this house has, you must confess, been one to set me on my guard.”

Mrs. Hamilton was silent.

“ At Mrs. Fairfax’s special request I undertook to be the governess of her children. On the first day of my arrival I came down, invited by Mrs. Fairfax, to spend the evening in her husband’s smoking-room. You, madam, know the reception I received. A few days later, in the same room, I seek the society of Mr. Bryanstone. Yes, Mrs. Hamilton, I don’t stoop to tell falsehoods, I seek his society, because he is a man and a gentleman, will talk to me as a human being for one half-hour, not as a machine for putting French into children’s heads, or supplying madam with the taste she lacks at her toilette! In the course of our conversation Mrs. Fairfax, my mistress, enters with her guests. Of the scene that follows I do not

choose to speak. You have heard of it, no doubt."

"I have heard it," said Mrs. Hamilton, "and I regret that Mrs. Fairfax should have used the expressions she did. But you seem to forget, Miss Forrester, that I have nothing to do with all this."

"Directly, no. Indirectly, yes!" cried Honoria, readily. "Mrs. Hamilton, let us speak out plainly. It will be best in the end. If I come to your house will you treat me as an equal, as a guest, or will you, while I eat of your salt, try incessantly to find out whether I am an adventuress or not?"

The words died on Mrs. Hamilton's lips. Nothing daunts people so thoroughly as the truth, blurted out unexpectedly at them in this way; and Honoria was not slow to perceive her advantage.

"I have stated, I am prepared to state on my oath, and to prove, that I lived for seven years with Miss Jarvis, at Peckham. You doubt it. Let us each keep to our beliefs. If I am an adventuress, I shall not hurt you—these things

are not catching—but tell me, honestly, before I come to you, what I must expect? To be treated like an equal, or waited for in ambush, like a suspected criminal?”

Honoria Forrester would never have said this to Mrs. Fairfax, but one of her leading mental traits, the one that fitted her so thoroughly for the higher walks of intrigue, was her capability for discerning the higher points of her antagonist's character, and utilising them. Any appeal to Mrs. Hamilton's sense of honour touched her as it would have touched a man—indeed a certain code of her own with regard to truth and falsehood was one of the many “strange opinions,” for the holding of which women were wont to call poor Laura masculine.


“If you come to my house you will be as safe from question there as you would be in your own, Miss Forrester. You may rely on that.”

“Then I accept your invitation gratefully. A week will give me time to write to my relations in France and prepare them for my reception. But for you, madam, I must perforce have accepted Mr. Bryanstone's offer of help, which,

I suppose, would have been my *coup de grâce* with Mrs. Fairfax."

And she shot a look into Laura's face which said to her, as plain as one woman's eyes can say crushing things to another, "And you would have been too foolish to disobey him!" From that moment each understood the other thoroughly; each knew that it was to be a stand-up fight without pity and without quarter, till one or both should fall. But Laura Hamilton's heart sank as she looked at Miss Forrester's beautiful face, and thought of the unequal arms with which the battle must be fought.

Mrs. Fairfax was not equal to the painful task of seeing Miss Forrester again. The children, even, were not sent to wish the naughty governess good-by. A quarter's salary was put into her hands by the housekeeper; the exact change of which she returned, keeping payment only for the sixteen days she had justly earned; and before noon she had quitted the Fairfaxes' house. Could Letty have heard the oath Miss Forrester swore to herself as she crossed the threshold, she would not have started off so




cheerfully that afternoon to tell all her friends of the charming way in which she had got rid of that dreadful creature of Mrs. Forsyth's.

For the oath the dreadful creature took was to become her, Letty Fairfax's, sister.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MR. LUMLEY MAKES HONOURABLE PROPOSALS.

A STUPID dinner-party at Mrs. Hamilton's was a thing not on record. She possessed that precise compound of imagination, tact, and grasp of detail which Mr. Mill tells us is required for organization in daily life. She knew what people to ask together; she knew how to place them at table; she knew how to bring them all out without shining herself. And her cook was irreproachable. The proportion of men to women at her entertainments was as three to one, always; one great reason, probably, why her house was popular; for men, over thirty—and she never asked boys—are ordinarily greatly bored by having to talk to women when they want to eat and drink. After dinner one excessively pretty young lady—Mrs. Hamilton always



had one excessively pretty young lady in reserve — would appear in white muslin and be ready to flirt, sing, play, or show off any other accomplishment that might be asked for. At dinner, Mrs. Hamilton herself, and one other woman, who could talk, were the only ladies among the six or seven men who ordinarily made up the party.

At first sight you would not always have given her credit for thorough discernment in her choice of guests; as, for instance, in asking Farnham Lumley to meet Bryanstone. But Mrs. Hamilton knew that personal liking is by no means necessary to bring men out during the three or four hours that you require them to be together at a dinner-party. Lumley never exerted himself to shine more than in Bryanstone's presence. Bryanstone never gave way less to any of his accustomed fits of silence than before the legal possessor of his poor little dead sweetheart. If they played afterwards (and unlimited loo and écarté were, I am sorry to say, not unknown at Mrs. Hamilton's house), it ensured the party being kept up late and with



spirit, if these two men were staking against each other at the same table.

“ You have Lumley here to vex me,” Bryanstone would say, sometimes. “ I am sick of the eternal sight of that fellow’s white face at your left hand.”

“ I have Lumley to keep you from going to sleep,” was her answer. “ You are never half so agreeable when you haven’t Lumley to talk down into inferiority.”

And though she would say this, laughing, it was true. Henry Bryanstone was an honourable, true-hearted gentleman, and had it not in him to injure the enemy whose hand he had once received. But he had quite his share of small weaknesses; was no superhuman or magnanimous hero; and it did yield him pleasure, especially before the few men or women whom he liked, to throw Lumley well into the place, mentally and physically, that nature had designed him to fill.

The other guests on this first day of Miss Forrester’s arrival were to be Major Chamberlayne, a man quite undistinguishable in appearance

from all other yellow-whiskered majors, but celebrated over London for eating more food and telling more outrageous falsehoods than any other professional diner-out extant; a Frenchman — poor little De Bassompierre, next to Richard, Bryanstone's greatest friend: and the Derwent Keenes. But at the last moment Mrs. Keene was prevented, or said she was prevented, from coming, by illness; and as Mr. Keene chose to appear, "although he might have known he is only asked on account of Caroline," said Laura, Miss Forrester's presence was absolutely needed to preserve the symmetry of the table.

"If you had not, wanted me I would have asked not to come down till after dinner," she remarked, as she and Mrs. Hamilton stood together, drest, before the drawing-room fire. "But I am very glad, as it turns out, that I am here to fill the vacant place."

Mrs. Hamilton looked at her and made a civil answer; was she not on parole to do so? In her heart what would she have given to have had Caroline Keene (of whom ordinarily she was

not fonder than women are of their allies), Caroline Keene, Letty Fairfax, any other woman on earth, than this one with her strange, chameleon beauty, her thrilling voice, the nameless grace that was about her in whatever attitude she took, whatever dress, costly or simple, that she wore.

The word "chameleon" really does describe Honoria Forrester's beauty better than any other. You analysed her, and she was not beautiful, certainly, but then she was never twice the same! and this, to somewhat worn eyes, is a charm more potent than all chiselled lines and exquisite classic brows going. Few men past thirty can dine off one dish. Few men past five and twenty can be seriously enamoured of a statue. Beauty to men of the world means dress, style, the desire to please, and, above everything else—change.

"Prends garde, ma chère," said an old Parisian coquette to her pale and handsome daughter. "Les jeunes femmes qui ne mettent pas de rouge sont toujours quittées pour de vieilles femmes qui en mettent trop."

Mediocrity, carefully cultivated, is, in this generation, worth all stupid, natural, raw excellence. It might be very well for the men of old Greece to care for hyacinthine hair and naiad-like face. But I fancy in London or Paris Helen herself would stand a poor chance in the nineteenth century, unless Madame Elize had first assisted at her toilet.

It was Honoria Forrester's habit to dress in heavy materials; rich velvets, sweeping silks. To-night she was in a high white muslin, inimitably fresh, as everything about her always was, and only relieved round the throat and wrists by little bands of black velvet. She was too full of figure for this to be the style really most suited to her; but for once the effect was marvellous. Somewhat more flushed than usual, with her soft hair brought low, as her fashion was, on the forehead, but pushed back from the temples, and falling with studied looseness on her neck, Honoria Forrester did not look a day more than nineteen. Laura Hamilton (although she too was looking her best, poor Laura, in an amber silk, and black lace trimming, and with a

single scarlet flower set, Spanish fashion, as Bryanstone had told her suited her best, in her black hair), felt herself old and faded by her side.

Bryanstone and Gaston de Bassompierre were the first to arrive. De Bassompierre, although he was almost thirty, and had lived enough to make up half a dozen ordinary lives, looked quite a boy still, with his dark hair parted down the centre of his little handsome head, and his wistful blue eyes, that his friends averred could make any woman in love with him at their first glance. At five and twenty the first doctors in the world had told De Bassompierre that he must die ; in five years certainly, at the rate he was living then ; in ten, possibly fifteen, if he chose to take to early hours, careful living, and a warmer climate. He chose the shorter time manfully, and held to the life that he knew must kill him, with an inexorable steadfastness that in a better cause might well have been called heroism. As easily moved as a child in everything else, not Bryanstone, his greatest friend, dared ever speak one word to him about his

own health. Worn to a shadow, with the pallor of death itself upon his face, unless occasionally, when the fever of disease lit it into morbid red, De Bassompierre lived on at a pace that would have made havoc even upon a constitution of iron.

“What will you have?” he said once, when Bryanstone had ventured to expostulate with him. It was a bright summer morning, and as they were driving home after a night of languenet in De Bassompierre’s carriage, along the silent London streets, Bryanstone noticed with horror that each time he coughed blood stained the poor fellow’s white lips. “What will you have? If I stopped, if I once began to think, I might regret myself, perhaps. As it is, I only feel that I am going to the many along a road of flowers. What do men gain who pass thirty? They sit in their arm-chairs—but Musette marries! Thank the gods, I shall never assist at any ceremony of that kind.”

This was many months ago, and Bryanstone had never since striven to combat with De Bassompierre’s paganism. The end was ominously

near now. The greatest man in London for consumption—the man whose fiats have sent forth desolation to how many hundred English households—had been taken this spring by Bryanstone, through the connivance of De Bassompierre's valet, to look at him in his sleep. The examination lasted five minutes, and the sentence again was death. Not all the art in Europe could bring him through another two years. "But unless his friends have religious scruples on the subject, let nothing be told to him," said W——. "In his disease, to take away hope is to take away life at once."

And Bryanstone being, I fear, rather pagan in his own principles, decided to say nothing. Only long after the doctor was gone he found himself standing, with wet cheeks, looking down upon De Bassompierre's unconscious, boyish face. He had never shed tears for Lady Sarah Lumley. But most Englishmen could easier weep for their friend than for their mistress.

Mrs. Hamilton introduced De Bassompierre immediately to Miss Forrester, and had the

pleasure of seeing that she smiled quite as sweetly on him as on Bryanstone.

"But of course you will take her to dinner," she managed to whisper to the latter, when the other men had arrived, and the conversation had become general. "Mr. Lumley must take me, I suppose. Shall you or Gaston have the pleasure of sitting by Miss Forrester?"

"Oh, let Gaston," said Bryanstone, indifferently. "It must do him good to hear her true Parisian gutturals, after all the wiry English-French the poor fellow is accustomed to."

Nevertheless, when dinner was announced, Mr. Bryanstone chanced to be at Honoria's side, and although De Bassompierre was standing, only waiting to be told what to do, Mr. Bryanstone's was the arm which conducted Miss Forrester to the dining-room.

"Who is that lady," whispered Lumley to Mrs. Hamilton, on the stairs. "Miss—Miss Warrener, was it? I did not quite catch the name."

"Miss Forrester," answered Laura, briefly. "Quite a new acquaintance of mine. I thought,



from the way you looked at her when you came in, that you must have seen her already, Mr. Lumley?"

"I believe I have," Lumley answered. He knew every detail of the scene before the bishops—both of the imbecile men having imported it straight from Letty's house to their several clubs. "But I am the strangest fellow for forgetting names. Did I ever tell you," he said this in the low but perfectly distinct tone that makes its way so unerringly to ears for which it is intended, "did I ever tell you the ludicrous mistake I made abroad once? It was between three and four years ago. Yes, in September 185—, and it occurred at Homburg." Then he stopped.


Mrs. Hamilton, who was just considering at which part of the table Mr. Derwent Keene would best sustain his natural vocation of "buffer," did not press for the conclusion of the story. Miss Forrester, who was glancing up into Bryanstone's eyes, a few steps farther on, felt as if an unseen hand had suddenly given her a blow.

“I—I thought there was another step,” she stammered, as Bryanstone asked what had made her start so violently? And then she laughed—a horribly forced laugh it was, though—over her own nervousness, and went on with what appetite she might to the dinner-table.

September, 185—, and it occurred at Homburg! After all, it might be accidental, though. How many hundred men might have been at Homburg in September, 185—, without knowing anything of her? But still, while she strove to reassure herself, every sound of Lumley’s voice from the other side of the table made Honoria’s heart turn sick; every moment she felt that the *dénouement* of that Homburg story *must* be about to be told! An *épergne* full of flowers stood so as to directly shelter her from seeing him, and for this she mentally thanked her presiding destiny. She knew that she had only to look full in his face to remember him if . . . if indeed he had been one of the actors in her darkened past life. And if discovery was to come, let it, at least, be later—not here in the face of them all, in the very moment

when the promises of success seemed so fair, with Bryanstone's eyes upon her, the pleasant tone of Bryanstone's voice in her ears, with Laura Hamilton—the woman who loved him—eager to look on and bear witness to her shameful defeat.

The dinner passed off excellently. Henry Bryanstone, while really admiring Miss Forrester more than he had ever done until this evening, did not show his admiration so openly as to make his hostess miserable. Lumley was more agreeable than anybody had ever seen him before; sedulously attentive to Mrs. Hamilton, genially appreciative of the Major's stories, cordial to De Bassompierre—whom he hated—civil even to little Jemmy Keene (who, relieved from his wife's superior abilities, seemed to think himself rather a clever kind of man, and, drawn out by Laura, made quite a long speech in words of one syllable, on the way he had once seen woodcocks dressed in Corfu). The ladies sat a long time over dessert, as was the habit at Mrs. Hamilton's house; and when they at length rose to go, Farnham Lumley, who hastened to open



the door, made a very flowery speech in deprecation of any enlightened women thinking it necessary to follow the barbarous British custom at all.

He fixed his eyes steadily on Honoria while he spoke; and sweeping close beside him as she went out, she felt herself forced, whether she willed it or not, to meet them. A second's glance told her all. She had never known him personally; but she remembered his face as well as a few days before she had remembered Tontin's; had been in the same public rooms with him a dozen times at least. It might have been worse, truly; but still it was bad enough. Only—for in this second of time Honoria's subtle brain could calculate the possibility of a hedge—only Farnham Lumley was reported to be Bryanstone's bitterest enemy. . . . More chance for her so, at least, than if the discovery had been made by De Bassompierre, or any other of his friends.

She was perfectly calm when the women were alone in the drawing-room. In a life of constant hazard like hers, the moments in which the

dice-box is still on the table are alone the moments of agony. As soon as she saw her throw, whatever it was, Honoria Forrester's plucky nature rallied. As she had said on that afternoon in Harley Street, when she was speculating over her chances of seeing Bryanstone, so she said now. "Let the worst come, and I accept it. Two thousand pounds, and my freedom will be mine still. Not I, but my fate must act out the remainder of this night's game."

"Your dinner was charming, Mrs. Hamilton. It is the first English party I have seen at which people talked."

"Well, we had good material," answered Laura, "except poor Mr. Keene—and I find one Mr. Keene a necessity, somehow—all the men were good talkers. You have met Mr. Lumley before, I conclude?"

"Mr. Lumley? Never." And Honoria looked up innocently from her coffee.

"He mentioned having seen your face. I concluded he must have been a guest of Mrs. Forsyth's."

"Oh, dear no. With the solitary exception

of Mr. Bryanstone, Mrs. Forsyth never had any man under fifty to dinner during the time I lived with her. But Mr. Lumley may possibly have seen me at the opera. I believe I have been there four times altogether in my life. Mrs. Lumley is not here to-night?"

"Mrs. Lumley! Do you mean his wife? Well, Miss Forrester, I certainly thought everyone in London knew all about Farnham Lumley's domestic affairs. He married first"—and then, which was what Honoria wanted—Mrs. Hamilton gave a short epitome of his two ill-fated marriages, omitting, you may be sure, Henry Bryanstone's name in the history.

"But I don't see what broke the first wife's heart," said Honoria. "Probably she was consumptive, and her relations sentimentally called the disease heart-brokenness—if that is the correct English word."

"Possibly," said Mrs. Hamilton, curtly. "At all events, it was a very good thing for herself, and everybody else, that she died when she did."

"I forget whether you said she was pretty?"

"Oh, not in the least," answered Laura,

decisively. "A woman with a baby-face and short, floss-silk hair. I did not know her personally, but I recollect seeing her at a ball given by the ——th at Hounslow, the last time she was ever seen in public, and thinking her in very bad style indeed, and almost plain."

Laura Hamilton stopped abruptly. The whole *mise en scène* of that ball; Henry Bryanstone's pleading face; Lady Sarah's fresh young beauty and shining dress and water-lilies; all rose before her and made the words die in her throat. And Honoria needed to ask no further question. She had heard vague rumours of Bryanstone's first love, and of the cause of Farnham Lumley's hatred to him. As she looked in Mrs. Hamilton's eyes she knew that these rumours were true: this woman, with the baby-face and floss-silk hair, had been loved by Bryanstone. In the perilous pass wherein she found herself now, was it quite impossible to utilize Lumley's long-cherished hatred into an instrument for her own preservation?

The entrance of a young woman in white tarlatane and blue ribbons prevented her from

feeling her way farther ; so she took up a morsel of microscopic embroidery and patiently awaited the coming of the men, while Laura Hamilton and her dear little friend " Fanny " went through the customary rites of female affection before the fire.

Fanny was Mrs. Hamilton's after-dinner amusement for the time being ; and, it is needless to add, was quite a model young woman for this purpose. She was exactly eighteen (Laura's young ladies, like her pages, never exceeded a given age), with great hazel eyes, rather wide apart, a tiny nose and mouth, peach-coloured skin, low straight forehead, and enormous quantities of crepé brown hair ; just, in short, what Leech's pencil has taught us to consider the type of English young-ladyhood. When she went to the country, Fanny was a very good little thing indeed, and looked after the poor, and coalesced with the curates like one of Miss Yonge's heroines, or her own elder sister of ten years ago. In London she knew everything about everybody, from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the owner of the cream-coloured



ponies, and was quite ready to give very unbiassed and outspoken opinions of her own respecting them all. She had been everywhere in Europe, and beyond Europe; and talked all languages with the same unabashed, ungrammatical fluency. No one ever inspired her with any reverence; no one had ever seen her put out of countenance. The last mistake in Deuteronomy, or the last divorce case; man's place in nature, or the forthcoming sale in St. John's Wood; religion, geology, prize-fighting, croquet, écarté, love-making; nothing was too great or too small, too orthodox or too heathenish, for Fanny to discourse upon. And in the majority of cases her discourses were really quite as well worth listening to as those of elder people.

There is a great outcry made sometimes against the fast, unblushing, outspoken girls of this generation. But not surely by persons who have made the law of demand and supply their study. That marriageable women are—as they are—should be their vindication to men. Who calls for the article? Where is the cause of the effect? In taking a young person like Fanny to

pass your life with, there is at least this to be said—you know better what you are about than men did in the old time when girls were tonguetied and broken in to bashfulness. It is a moot question still whether the British or Gallican be the safer school of training for future wives; and the Eastern custom of keeping women veiled has certainly, up to the present point of the world's history, not been strikingly successful in its results. But these are my suggestions only.

As Honoria Forrester glanced up from her embroidery at Fanny's face, and listened to the subjects Fanny was discussing, she formed the cynical opinion that the difference between the people talked of and between those who talked was one of degree only, not of kind.

But then Honoria Forrester belonged to a class, and so of course could not afford to be either charitable or philosophic.

A pretty little dimly-lighted conservatory opened out from Mrs. Hamilton's back drawing-room; and by the time the men came up Miss Forrester had left her companions, and was

bending over some white azalias and camellias by the door of this conservatory in one of the graceful attitudes that suited her figure so well.

“Has Laura been snubbing her, after all?” thought Bryanstone; “or is it only to show a new pose? I suppose I must go and ask her. The best way with such women is always to speak the truth—’tis the only attack against which they can bring no counter weapon of their own.”

But while he was just hesitating whether to do so or not, Lumley, who had that moment entered, walked straight over to the conservatory door; and Bryanstone, much too indifferent to contest the prize, took his place by Fanny’s side, and listened, well amused, to the very lively dissertation she was commencing with De Bassompierre as to the last, and by no means faintly-coloured, scandal of the clubs.

“Do the plants look healthy? Not that there’s very much light to tell by.”

Honorina Forrester betrayed not the faintest token of noticing his familiarity.

“I am afraid there’s a little blight among

them ; look at this rose-leaf." She picked one, and came up to his side. "Don't you think that it looks like blight?" And she held her beautiful white arm towards him with a gesture that, if he chose, he might have taken for one of humble, despairing entreaty.

"Oh, I don't understand these subjects," he answered, taking the leaf a moment and then flinging it away. "I don't go in for anything pastoral or innocent—do you?"

"Monsieur!"

"Ah, I like to hear that. It reminds me of old times—reminds me, too, that you are half a foreigner, and, like Mrs. Hamilton, won't faint at the smell of a cigar. May I?" he drew forth a case from his pocket. "Smoke's excellent for aphides, you know." Without waiting for her answer, he took out a cigar, put it between his teeth, then produced a tiny cigarette of rose-coloured tissue paper and offered it to her. "I always go about provided for myself and my friends, too. Let me recommend you this. Its Latakia, and irreproachable." And, as he spoke, Farnham Lumley threw himself

down into a low easy-chair just inside the conservatory, and stared up insolently into Honoria Forrester's face.

"Thank you," she replied quietly, after a moment's silence; "I never smoke now;" and then she turned away her face from him, and went on again with her examination of the aphides.

"Ah," remarked Lumley, after striking a light with cool assurance for his own cigar, and replacing the cigarette in his case. "You don't smoke, now, don't you? the time for cakes and ale and the rest of it is past. Lord, Lord, what a life it is! Miss Forrester," abruptly, "how long have you been living in England?"

"For years and years," she answered; but she bent her face closer down as she spoke. "I was two years with Mrs. Forsyth, and before that I was for seven long years in a ladies' school."

"In a what?"

She was silent. What good was there, she began to think, in trying to parry the coarse thrusts of such an assailant as this. Better let

him say his say ; threaten her with his enmity or his love whichever it might be ; and then let her make her election. Brave him or accept his terms.

“ In what place did you say you lived before you went to Mrs. Forsyth ? ”

“ I said in a ladies’ school, Mr. Lumley.”

But in spite of her forced calmness her voice could not but shake a very little.

“ A ladies’ school ! Oh, good God ! ” and Lumley went off into one of his odious fits of chuckling laughter. “ Well, that’s neat. A ladies’ school. Did you ever take your pupils to Homburg, now, for the benefit of their health ? ”

No answer. But the fingers of the strong white hand farthest away from him clenched convulsively. Honoria was as tempted as she had ever been in her life to hit Farnham Lumley straight in his cowardly white face, then and there, and let the worst come.

“ You must pardon me the question, but I was in Homburg myself, between three and four years ago, and your face recalls a scene I wit-

nessed there so strongly that I can't help asking it—shall I tell you what that scene was ? ”

“ If you choose.”

“ Well,” he went on smoking as he talked, and brought out every word with the slow, deliberate gusto of a man who is epicurean in his enjoyment of his listener's torture. “ I must tell you first that Homburg is a wicked, a very wicked place. The Church of England Service is certainly performed twice every Sunday, but even this does not keep people from being vicious ; in short there's gambling and every other kind of immorality going on from morning till night. I don't shock you ? Of course not. You are a *femme artiste*, above little drawing-room pruderies. In the autumn I speak of there were heaps of foreigners, Russians especially, in Homburg, and the public gambling tables not being kept open late enough to please some of these gentlemen, very pleasant little private parties, or suppers as they were called, used to be got up after midnight. The scene I am going to tell you of took place at one of those suppers. There were seven or eight men present, and also, Miss Forrester,”

here he lowered his voice, "three or four of your sex. I need not speak much of these ladies. It is said that at some of the German establishments, beautiful faces are occasionally hired by the proprietors of the banks to lure fools on at rouge et noir and roulette. Possibly some of these faces, in a non-official capacity, may have been present at the entertainment I speak of. We will call the ladies themselves by the first names we think of—Minie, Lisette, Nita"—here he paused a second; "anything you will. They were pretty, you may be sure, and young, and not totally inexperienced either in lansquenet, écarté, or champagne. Champagne brings me to the point—ain't I a fool now? don't I tell stories vilely? Some of the men had been drinking, perhaps, to be more literally true, the whole party had been drinking; and a hot quarrel between two youngsters, a Frenchman and a Russian, was got up at supper. Well, the dénouement was the most sickening thing, on my word the most sickening thing I ever saw in my life. The Russian goaded on, bit by bit, at last openly accused the other of foul play.



The Frenchman answered by a sneer, and in a minute—So—! had a glass decanter hurled across the table at his head. Instead of him it hit a woman, the prettiest in the room—Nita, let us say—who, with the instinctive goodness of you all, was leaning towards him trying to pacify him no doubt at the moment. She gave no scream—plucky nature, poor beggar, she must have been—but started up to her feet with a face of stone, then staggered back with the blood pouring over her white dress to a sofa. At first they thought he had killed her, for the cut was deep and mortally close to the temple; but in a few days I saw her out again, and I was told the Russian, who was a very good fellow when he wasn't drunk, made it up to her. The worst thing for a woman would be the scar that must follow upon such a wound, unless, indeed, Miss Forrester, she had the sense to wear her hair classically low upon her forehead as you do."

When Lumley's narrative was over, Honoria Forrester stood for a moment silent. In that minute her determination was formed. She

turned quickly; came and seated herself on a little low chair close to his side.

"Finish your story," she said in a singular kind of compressed whisper. "I know what you are trying to say. Have it over quick!"

She raised her eyes, and they fell upon Henry Bryanstone's face. She saw that while he listened to Fanny and De Bassompierre he was in reality watching her. Great Heaven! if one syllable of what Lumley said should have reached his ears!

"My story? Oh, I think it is finished," answered Lumley; but the insolence of his manner was somewhat abating. He began to see that his victim was not a fool to be trifled with at his pleasure. "If—if—I mean the rest I've got to say isn't a story at all but an hypothesis, Miss Forrester."

"Whatever you have got to say, say it at once, if you please."

"Well, just suppose now," he took his cigar from his mouth, and as he spoke amused himself by trying with one finger to stroke off infinitesimal portions of its ashes. "Suppose that the

woman we have called Nita was to have got tired of her life—or her life of her—and by some fluke we can't at present fathom, to turn up among quasi-respectable women, and among men of the world, in London. Her aim is marriage of course. The aim of every woman always is marriage. And as she possesses no common good looks there seems a fair possibility that she will one day find the necessary fool, veil, ring, and parson that make up the ceremony. The fool, indeed, is already almost on the hook, when, in an unlucky moment, some one turns up who remembers her in her old, and far more agreeable, character, remembers in fact the adventure that marked her for life at Homburg. The position is a trying one for her, is it not?"

"Not a bit," said Miss Forrester, promptly. "Not a bit. If she can't outwit the scoundrel who threatens to betray her, which is doubtful, a woman of that kind would never be without hosts of resources in herself. There are more fools than one in the world, any day."

And she examined the mourning ring on her

white hand with a smile that was not in the least counterfeit. Like a true artist, Honoria always warmed to her work. The most losing part she had ever played afforded her zest while she was playing it.

“You are right there,” said Lumley, after watching her face steadfastly. “Nothing would be too vile for such a woman as the one we speak of. Don’t think for a moment I mean to cast such a slur upon her as that. What I was going to suppose is this—that the man who remembers her and the man she means to marry are friends; in other words, that they hate each other like death. How if one of them, wishing to wipe out an old debt, should offer to befriend Mademoiselle Nita? He knows the world of Englishmen better than she does; knows that to be brought out in London as he, if he chose, could bring her out, would give her a far greater chance with the weak-brained fool she is aiming at than she could ever have alone, unnoticed and poor. Suppose, I say, that circumstances like these should arise, and such an alliance should be offered her, what would her answer be?”

Miss Forrester raised her eyes again, and looked full for a moment at Bryanstone's handsome unsuspecting face ; then drew her chair abruptly back out of his sight, and laid her hand on Lumley's arm. He was a coward physically rather than morally, poor wretch, and actually winced and turned pale at the sudden grasp of those iron, muscular fingers.

"I—I didn't mean—" he stammered.

"Yes, you did," she interrupted him savagely. "You meant all, and much more, and what *I* mean is, that you shall say your meaning out in plainer words. I'll make it easy for you. Two people, the man a blackguard, the woman an adventuress, are each trying how to sell an honest-hearted gentleman, Henry Bryanstone by name. The man, poor chicken-livered wretch ! thinks to get his dirty vengeance with least risk to himself by making the woman his tool. The woman is ready to accept his terms—but not his insolence, by Heaven ! What he means to say, he must say out !" Her grasp tightened ominously, "and what he undertakes he must keep to. Nothing, as he remarks, is too vile for such a

woman to do. Why, curse you!" and she let go her hold and looked straight and close into his eyes; "I could murder you at this moment. I know the Thug embrace. I could have you dead before any of them could get to your side."

He turned ghastly white (she meant nothing by all she had said: it was a little bit of preliminary acting she always went through with men of a certain temperament). "I'd no intention of offending you," he gasped out. "I'm sure I thought I said what I did very delicately, and I'm quite in earnest in my offers of doing you a service. My carriage and horses would be at your disposal. I'd ask Mrs. Hamilton to accept my Opera box for the season, and——"

"And expect what in return?" interrupted Honoria; but in a gentle tone. The delicious, tangible money offers fell like familiar music on her ear.

"Simply what I told you," he answered. "Why need we use hard words to each other, Miss Forrester? I'm sure I'm offering the most unselfish thing a fellow can offer—to be made

free use of as a harmless rival against another man. We're friends, are we not? Our compact is sealed?"

"Oh, friends, certainly!" she answered; "or allies, which to such people as us, means a great deal more. Here!" She gave him her hand, and he was just raising it, excessively nervously, towards his lips, when Mrs. Hamilton made her appearance in the doorway.

"They are talking of loo, already, Mr. Lumley;" but in a moment her eyes took in every detail of the position. "What do you say? I think it's a great deal too early yet."

"Well, I think you'll have five without me," he answered, Laura noticed not at all in his accustomed affected drawl. "I was just going to challenge Miss Forrester to a little quiet écarté."

"Do as you like, but I am afraid we shan't make up a table without you. You know Fanny and I don't play."

"Oh, yes, do join, Mr. Lumley," said Honoria, in her softest voice, "and I'll come and take a lesson and bring you luck. I know nothing

about any of your English games." And she rose, and a moment later re-entered the drawing-room on his arm.

Seeing her there, with her white dress and shining golden hair, the vision of his little sweetheart rose up, with sudden sharp pain, before Henry Bryanstone's memory. Was this woman to be Farnham Lumley's next victim?

As he thought that, he went nearer to liking her than he had ever done yet. Honoria gave a glance into his face—and knew it.

The cards were playing well.



## CHAPTER XII.

### LOVE UNDER THE LAMPS.

AND Farnham Lumley kept to his promise. In a fortnight Honoria Forrester, with her golden hair and dark blue habit, splendidly mounted, and always with Lumley at her side, was one of the best-known women in London. Laura Hamilton was beginning to think she might as well ask her, poor thing, to spend another month in her house; and Letty, when she heard daily of more and more successes, quite fretted over her own ill-luck in having quarrelled with her handsome governess.

“And if you should meet her, be civil to her, Richard,” she commanded her husband, “and affect to treat our little quarrel as a joke. Every one says Mr. Lumley is infatuated, and Cassandra Peto told me to-day his wife has only

an inch and a-half of lungs left, and that he makes no secret as to his intention about Miss Forrester. I think the situation for the present frightfully compromising; still, poor dear Laura is quite accustomed to anything of that kind, and if it all ends in marriage it would be most annoying for me not to be on terms with Lumley's wife. Now, how would it be, I wonder, to ask them all to dinner here, quietly?"

"After turning her out of the house a fortnight ago?" answered Richard. "No, Letty, make up to the young woman if you think her morals in any way patched up by being under Lumley's protection, but don't subject yourself to the chance of refusal from the cad himself. I'm sorry for you, child," he added; "but even the cleverest hedge must fall through sometimes. To back God and Mammon equally heavily requires a great deal of discretion. Still, considering that Mammon was so nearly out of the running at the time you put your money on, I don't see that your judgment is much to blame."

"Oh, don't be blasphemous, Richard," interrupted Letty, angrily ; "and if you won't ask him to dinner, go at least and leave your card on Mr. Lumley to-day."

Now, in saying that Miss Forrester was "brought out," I don't at all wish to convey the idea that Duchesses and Marchionesses rushed to invite her to their entertainments ; for they did nothing of the kind. Indeed, if they ever noticed her riding by Farnham Lumley's side, the grand ladies of Belgravia judged, I have no doubt, pretty much as Mrs. Fairfax did on the celebrated occasion when she surprised her at Henry Bryanstone's feet. But there are a great many worlds in London besides that of Marchionesses. The world to which Farnham Lumley introduced Miss Forrester was almost exclusively that of men ; and it was precisely here that Honoria was surest of success. No man who came across her was uninfluenced by her charms of person and manner ; and the somewhat equivocal and mysterious position in which she evidently stood to Lumley rather increased than lessened the interest with which they regarded her.

"Whatever she is, she's too good for him," was the unanimous verdict of all who watched the progress of the intimacy. By no one was this opinion more heartily indorsed than by the man for whose benefit the whole game was being played—Henry Bryanstone himself.

Shelter his folly from his own heart as he might, he *was* jealous of Lumley already. He was not in love one bit with Honoria Forrester. He would as soon have offered to put his neck into a halter at once, as have deliberately offered to marry her. With the solitary exception of Farnham Lumley, he would, after Letty's cruelty to the girl, have been grateful to any man who would have taken her fairly off his hands, and so have ended the matter. But with Lumley it was different. He felt that Lumley had deliberately sought to cut him out and had succeeded; felt—so well did Honoria act her part—that the girl was bringing herself unwillingly to accept Lumley and Lumley's money (with whatever specious offer of marriage that consummate scoundrel chose to offer) through pique against himself.

Was he again to stand by—he would ask himself this when Honoria, silent and submissive, as she rode along by Lumley in the Park, would give him a trembling little smile or furtive, quick withdrawn glance as he past—was he again to stand by and see the same old story enacted? Another woman who loved, or who might have loved him, given over to Lumley's arms?

Happily he had wise mentors to assist his own reason in combating any passing sentimentalism of the kind. Richard Fairfax, who possessed the happy detective inspirations of a child, declared his conviction from the first as to the whole thing being a dead case of roping. That scoundrel Lumley hadn't the look of a man who meant winning, and was ready to run wide at any moment, if Henry would be only fool enough to try to lead. De Bassompierre, with the refreshing business view of love affairs that Frenchmen always take, never would have it otherwise than that Mees Forrester was making use of Lumley's money, as she would have done of Bryanstone's or any other man's, to bring herself

publicly forward in the best possible style before the notice of the town. Laura Hamilton was unwearied in producing little anecdotes that proved, with logical clearness, how readily Honoria pocketed all the tangible proofs—*id est*, rings and bracelets—of Mr. Lumley's regard. And Henry Bryanstone listened to them all, and was wise. Wise, till the next sight of the bent-down golden head so close to Lumley's in the Row made him a fool again !

All this time Mrs. Hamilton kept steadfastly to her promise of regarding her guest's secret and past life as inviolate ; kept to it so well, indeed, as greatly to disconcert Honoria ; who, relying more upon the broad principles of human nature than upon any adventitious deviations from the same in the shape of honour, organized many neat little traps for her hostess in the shape of blotting-cases left open, notes carelessly lying in work-box drawers, and the like incentives to friendly inquiry.

One day, however, when she was absent—with Lumley, of course—Bryanstone chanced to call ; and, as luck would have it, Miss Forrester's

desk was again lying ostentatiously open on a writing-table in Mrs. Hamilton's little morning-room. It was some minutes before Laura made her appearance, and Bryanstone, while he waited, began turning about the books on the writing-table in an absent mechanical way, as he had a trick of doing. The open desk in process of time came under his hand ; and, never doubting that it was Laura's, he opened one of the compartments and took up a small book, or rather a full-grown tract, that was lying on the top of a pile of notes and papers (I must really reiterate that it was a habit of Bryanstone's to ransack Laura's writing-case and work-boxes with the most perfect freedom, either in or out of her presence, and that the foolish woman was never more exquisitely pleased than to find him thus occupied). The book was the same comforting little discourse on perpetual perdition which Honoria had put away among things to be kept on the night of Mrs. Forsyth's death. Bryanstone opened it at hazard, and found these words written on the title page :—

“ Miss Honoria Forrester. An offering of

good-will from her pastor and well-wisher, the Reverend Alfred Prettyman. Given at the examination of pupils. 'The Cedars,' Peckham, December, 185—."

"The Cedars, Peckham." Then Tontin's recollections and Mrs. Hamilton's suspicions were alike at fault. Miss Forrester in this, at least, had told the truth. "December, 185—." As he re-read the Reverend Alfred's feeble little cramped hand-writing it occurred, idly, to Bryanstone to wonder what he himself had been doing at that time. He thought back over the last four or five autumns, and recollected he was in Scotland with Richard. They had rented a moor between them, and the sport was magnificent. Remembering this impressed the date for ever upon Bryanstone's mind—Bryanstone, who generally forgot everything to do with other people's affairs within five minutes after he heard them!

Decidedly, the Fates were working dead in favour of Honoria Forrester.

While he still held the book in his hand, Laura Hamilton came in.

"I wish, Mrs. Hamilton, you would tell your



friends to keep their desks locked," said Bryanstone. "I began prying about just now among your possessions, as usual, and find myself suddenly in the thick of Miss Forrester's love-tokens. If it happened to Lumley instead of myself it might have been serious. Look here."

Mrs. Hamilton took the book with the tips of her fingers, as one of Madame de Brinvilliers's friends might have taken a flower or pair of gloves from that lady's hand, glanced over the writing on the title-page, and gave it back to Bryanstone.

"You see she really did live at Peckham, after all, Laura."

"I see nothing, except that Miss Forrester leaves her desk open with an object," said Laura, decisively. "We needn't re-open the subject of her innocence, I think. It belongs a great deal more to Mr. Lumley than to us now; and will you please put the book back exactly as you found it. I don't want Miss Forrester to think I have any concern in her affairs."

"Well, I don't suppose any of us have," said

Bryanstone, with slightly forced carelessness.

"She is out, of course?"

"Of course. On a new horse of Mr. Lumley's, and with little Jemmy Keene with them, as chaperon. What do you think it all means?"

"I don't trouble myself to think about it," Bryanstone answered, throwing the book down on the table, and walking away to the fireplace. "I don't trouble myself about them at all, and in another fortnight I shall have forgotten Miss Forrester's existence. I'm going away, Laura. I came to-day to tell you so."

"Going away, in the very middle of the season, Mr. Bryanstone? What does that mean?"

"It means that poor De Bassompierre is ordered to get away from the English east winds, till June at least, and that I am going with him. We start for the Mediterranean in Armytage's yacht, on Monday."

Laura came up close to his side. "I am very glad you are going, Henry—very. More glad

than I have been of anything since I first knew Miss Forrester. You won't see her again before you start?" And she laid her hand on his arm—a rare action for Mrs. Hamilton, who was a woman extraordinarily chary of caresses. "You will let Lumley have the course to himself, will you not?"

"Most decidedly," said Bryanstone. "Miss Forrester is a vast deal too good for him, but she's old enough to know her own mind, and certainly is not in any way under my protection. As to seeing her again, of course I shall—why not? Why, I want you all to come to me on Saturday, Laura. You are going to the Opera, I know, and you must come to my house to supper afterwards. You and Miss Forrester, and Fanny, if you choose, and I'll ask Lumley and some other fellows to meet you. Don't make objections, Mrs. Hamilton. The thing is settled; and please don't look so preternaturally suspicious," he added, looking down kindly into her serious face. "I am not two-and-twenty, nor at all likely to be brought to book by having Mr. Farnham Lumley played off against me

—cleverly though Miss Forrester manages the game.”

And hearing such excellent sense from his own lips, Laura could not but promise to let him spend one more evening in the danger of Honoria’s society.

“Lumley will keep by her all the time,” she thought, when Bryanstone had left, and she stood listening, as she always did, to the last sound of the wheels that bore him from her. “And if not, Henry knows at least what her game is.”

And when Miss Forrester came in, radiant from her ride, Laura had the exquisite pleasure of announcing to her, with a quiet smile, that Mr. Bryanstone, “in spite of the Derby, and everything, was going to Italy for the spring,” and of seeing that Honoria’s face changed horribly, notwithstanding all her self-command, when she heard it.

Henry Bryanstone’s departure was, indeed, a desperate, an utterly unexpected blow to Miss Forrester. Unless he could be brought to speak before Monday, her chance with him would be

gone. She knew that a man once out of sight, and as little in love as he was, is lost. She wrote at once a note to Lumley, telling him, in couched terms, of the news ; and from that day till Saturday neither received his visits nor left the house. She didn't eat ; she walked about her room at night instead of sleeping ; and when Bryanstone saw her, for the first time, at the opera, on Saturday, her wan cheeks touched him.

Adventuress or no, she was a beautiful woman, acting love with consummate art for himself ! As he watched her face from his stall she looked to him, in her pallor, not unlike what Lady Sarah had looked that day in her father's library, when she fell upon his breast, and besought him to save her from Lumley ! Lady Sarah became Lumley's wife. To what worse fate might this new victim be drifting ? And if she were indeed playing Lumley off against himself, where was her sin ? She gave him a long entreating look just before the curtain fell on Margaret, "gerettet," and when she followed Mrs. Hamilton from the box, five

minutes later, Bryanstone stood in the passage and offered her his arm.

"But—but, Mrs. Hamilton," she stammered, looking down with admirable confusion. "Will you not take Mrs. Hamilton?"

"Lumley will do that," said Bryanstone; for Lumley of course was on the scene. Then he added, in a whisper, "surely for once you will accept my services, Miss Forrester? It is for the last time, you know."

She answered by stealing her hand under his arm, and for a second seeming involuntarily to cling to it. Then she turned her face abruptly away, and kept it so, as they followed the rest of the party along the lobby.

"This horrible east wind penetrates everywhere," said Bryanstone, when they came to the stairs; "and you are not half wrapt up. I must take care of you."

He drew her cloak tighter across her throat, and while he did so Miss Forrester abruptly bent her head. Bryanstone knew, rather than felt, that for an instant her lips rested on his gloved hand, and his brain became fire. He

was a young man still ; and Honoria was beautiful ; and Lumley was his rival ; and— Well, let me say the worst out, 'tis a part of Bryanstone's history I don't care to dwell upon—temptation altogether was too strong for him, and he succumbed ! Whispered, Heaven knows what jealous folly about Lumley in her ear as he took her down the stairs, behind the rest.

The theatre was crowded that night, and, following their party, they had to walk about a hundred yards to get to their carriage. When they were in the open Haymarket, Honoria turned to him with a face of stone. Even in the flare of the gas-light Bryanstone could see how deadly white she was.

“ Mr. Bryanstone,” she said, “ I thought till to night I was utterly miserable, but you have taught me it is possible to be more miserable still ? You ask me not to love Mr. Lumley ! I have never loved him ; but I will *not* give him up ! As soon as he is free Mr. Lumley offers to marry me, and I am too poor to refuse him.”

The tone, the look, the words were all in their way perfect, and yet they missed their mark.

The solitary word "marry" had always power to restore Bryanstone to his senses, much as the threat of cold water restores a young lady in a faint to consciousness.

"I was a fool, Miss Forrester," he said, bluntly. "If Lumley was worthier of you I should not have spoken so. Will you forget it, please?"

"I—I can't forget anything you have said," she cried, almost with a sob; and then, mercifully, they found themselves close by Lumley and the rest; and Bryanstone put her into the carriage without another word. He was on the very edge of loving her. The touch of that poor little humble kiss was on his hand still; but as he drove rapidly along the Regent's Circus towards Piccadilly, he felt just as a man might feel who had tottered over a hideous precipice, and been saved!

"Laura was right," he thought. "I oughtn't to have seen her again. However, thank God, the danger is past. What on earth did the woman mean by kissing my hand if she wants to marry Lumley?" he asked himself next. "Is



it possible"—this really was the first time such a monstrous thought crossed his mind—"that she can want to marry me? No, no, no! A little passing infidelity, nothing more; but a solemn warning, nevertheless. I must never walk about by lamp-light with her again. Marry—great heavens!"

The sight of Richard Fairfax's face at the door of his own house put the finishing stroke on Bryanstone's restoration.

"Dick," he said, after leading him mysteriously aside into a little morning room on the ground-floor, "I've something to tell you before we go up-stairs, and it's this—I believe I've had a great escape—a miraculous escape, to night. I've been talking like an idiot to Miss Forrester, and she mentioned marriage."

"You don't mean to say so," cried Richard, looking excessively innocent. "Well, that shows me that Miss Forrester knows how to adapt her conversation to her company. Marriage isn't a subject much in her line, you know. Tontin has spotted her at last—remembers time, place, and everything. In the winter of 185—, Miss

Forrester was an actress, and not at all a good one, in the French plays at Vienna. He was coiffeur at the theatre at the time, and remembers her perfectly. She could not have heard much about marriage there, could she?"

"She was not there at all, Richard. I happen to know all about that. In December, 185—, Miss Forrester was getting tracts given her by a parson at Peckham. Tontin's an ass."

"But Tontin knows all about it, my good sir!" When Richard said "my good sir," it was an indication that all the energy of his nature was aroused. "Remembers her name—Liza—Annette—whatever it was she called herself. She'd been hissed off the stage for something in Paris, and had come to Vienna to try her luck. Just you mention the date and Tontin's name to her, and see how she takes it."

"Not I," said Bryanstone, indifferently. "If she had not begun to talk of disagreeable subjects, I believe I might have made a fool of myself. However, I didn't; and you and I have no inquiries (whatever Mr. Lumley may have) to make about her character."

“No; that we certainly have not,” answered Richard. “If Tontin is right, as I’ll swear he is, it’s a case in which inquiries would be ridiculous. Inquiry implies doubt. As to Lumley,” he added, when they were going up the stairs, “I believe he knows a precious deal more about the young woman than we do, and has no occasion whatsoever to search into her antecedents.”

The women were still alone when Bryanstone and Richard joined them. Mrs. Hamilton and Fanny together, of course; Honoria standing alone before a picture that hung in one of the recesses, in the back drawing-room. It was a picture of no great worth, that Bryanstone had bought of some modern artist in Germany; but that he valued more than all the rest of his possessions—a picture of a girl’s figure standing among corn-sheaves, and with the bright and childish face turned full to the setting sun.

Had he ordered this picture to be painted? Had the face been copied from any original likeness in his possession? That, no one knew, save Bryanstone; but whoever saw the picture, recognized in it at once the portrait of Lady Sarah

Lumley. Lumley in his own heart never felt his hatred to Bryanstone so intense as on the rare occasions when he found himself in his house, and in presence of this picture. If it had been an actual portrait of his wife he might have found courage to resent Bryanstone's hanging it on his walls; but the dress was the dress of a German peasant girl. Bryanstone himself called it a fancy sketch of Goethe's Gretchen. And still the eyes that had once implored to him in vain; the delicate blue-veined temple that his own brutal hand had struck, were there; not to awaken his remorse, but to goad his never-dying revenge into fresh energy every time that Lumley looked at them.

He arrived with two or three other men, while Honoria was still standing before the picture, and came up to her at once.

"How goes it for our side?" he asked, bending over her and speaking in a soft whisper. "Well, unless I mistake?"

"As badly as it can go," she answered abruptly. "Indeed the game's up. What's the good of my deceiving you?"

Lumley's face got black as night. "If you're selling me, you'll repent it," he said, between his set teeth. "You may take your oath to that. Women who sell me do repent of it generally, I can tell you."

She laughed carelessly. "I'm not a bit afraid, Mr. Lumley. I've braved men twice as big and quite as brutal as you, often, and never once come to grief. Never! What woman is this a picture of? Do you know? Some poor sickly girl who would have been afraid of a threat or a blow, I should say. Look at the great frightened eyes, and weak faltering mouth, and ——"

"—— her eyes, and her mouth, and all belonging to her!" interrupted Lumley, coarsely. "As if I hadn't been driven mad by their snivelling idiotcy times enough when she was alive!"

"What, you knew her, then? Mr. Lumley, you don't mean to say that this is a picture of Lady ——"

He caught hold of her wrist with a passion that gave Honoria infinite satisfaction. It showed what materials lurked under all Farnham

Lumley's cowardice. "Don't you mention her name!" he said, hoarsely. "I don't choose it. I won't hear it from your lips!"

He bit his own till they were bloodless.

"Ah, you loved her, then?" she remarked quietly. "Mr. Lumley, I can understand what you feel at seeing her picture openly in Henry Bryanstone's possession."

"I did not love her," he answered, in a voice choked with suppressed passion; "but she was my wife, and it's cursed bad taste in Bryanstone to have this picture in his room, and if one thing could make me hate him worse than I do, it's to see her here. Hate! I loathe, I abhor him! And now to think you're letting him go, that the blackest revenge I could have on him" ("Thanks" murmured Honoria) "is to fall through. By G—! it shan't though! Miss Forrester, I swear, standing here before *her*, that it shan't. What is there wrong? Did you use my name free enough? Did you tell him I have offered marriage as soon as I am free to marry? Will promise it in writing—anything. Because you may do all this and more—much more!"

His voice actually trembled ; his eyes glowed with a red sullen fire. Honoria Forrester, who was neither given to personal likes nor dislikes, felt herself shudder as his hot uneven breath came on her cheek.

"I as fully believe in your sincerity as in my own, Mr. Lumley ; but unfortunately our intentions won't alter Mr. Bryanstone's. He had an opportunity of speaking not an hour ago, and let it pass, and on Monday he leaves England. *Voilà !*" And she shrugged her shoulders expressively.

"But did he give way in the least? You know what I mean. Is the man jealous, spooney—whatever word you call such foolery by—or is he not?"

"Well," said Honoria, looking down, "he certainly is jealous, but not matrimonial, Mr. Lumley. I do not deceive you."

"Never mind : that'll come. Leave the rest to me. Do you swear he's jealous?"

"I swear he said he was." But she brought it out with something like difficulty, and glanced furtively into the other room. Standing beside

Farnham Lumley, Honoria felt herself human ; felt a sensation dimly akin to love towards the man upon whose hand her lips had rested not an hour before.

“That is enough. When do you say he leaves town ? On Monday next, and is to be away for the rest of the season. “Now, Miss Forrester, what do you mean to do with yourself in the interval ?”

“That is what I was going to ask you, Monsieur. I shall leave Mrs. Hamilton in a day or two, and have not another friend in England.”

“Not the lady in whose house you lived seven years ?”

“Not the lady in whose house I lived seven years.”

“And suppose—mind it’s only a supposition—suppose I was to say ‘Miss Forrester, our compact is at an end. You have been unsuccessful, and I have nothing further to say in the matter.’ How would you act ?”

“Oh, in that case,” answered Honoria, with admirable coolness, “I should thank you, Mr. Lumley, for a score or so of excellent mounts,



and for what you have shown me of London life. Your bracelets and rings I should return you (for I am not a well-born woman ; I have my ideas of honour), and in four-and-twenty-hours I should be in Paris, a city in which, as you may believe, I am not actually without resources. Allez ! Is Mr. Bryanstone the only man in the world worth winning ? ”

“ And suppose all this, and that you meet Bryanstone abroad again—in a different position, of course—what answer would you make if —— ”

“ That would be my affair, not yours,” she interrupted him shortly. “ As long as I’m playing on your side I shan’t sell you. Content yourself with that. On the day we dissolve partnership, my best wish will be never to see your face again, whatever I might feel about his.”

“ I like to hear you talk so,” said Lumley, with a chuckle. “ I like to see the stuff you’re made of, by G— I do ! It’s the winning kind. And now, mind, this is all talk. I’m not going to give you up, and you’re not going to give him up. Why, his going away at all shows he

thinks himself in danger. Would a man like Bryanstone leave London in May, and miss Chester and the Derby, and everything, unless he knew he was in some confounded mess?" Honoria again smiled her recognition of his delicacy. "You must keep your head above water well while he's away; I'll do that for you. I know scores of women who'd ask any one I bid them; and in August you shall meet him again. He goes every year to the Surtees in Norfolk, and I can get you there as easy as possible with the Haighs. Yes; unless I'm a greater fool than I take myself for, I'll have something ready for him on his return. And make what play you still can to-night," he added, in a whisper, as supper was announced, and people began to move; "a single word from a fool like Bryanstone would be something to hold him by, if you could only get him to speak it."

But to get this word spoken was by no means an easy matter. The moth had been too nearly singed to fly of his own free will into the flame again. Bryanstone sat by Laura at supper, and without in any marked manner seeming to avoid

Miss Forrester, never spoke to her, except with other people joining in the conversation, all the night.

“Unless I risk something, I must lose all,” she thought. “Lumley’s blackguard instinct is right. One word from Bryanstone would be worth more than a legal bond from him. But how to get it? He was near it, very near, when I looked at him in the Haymarket; can I put together nothing of the same kind now?”

She made her resolve in another minute; and, just as Mrs. Hamilton’s carriage was announced, walked up to Henry Bryanstone’s side.

“Give me your arm to the door,” she said, without looking at him. “It’s the last request I shall ever make of you.”

He obeyed, as a matter of course; and Lumley, who followed, and took Laura Hamilton, contrived so adroitly to favour some delay on the stairs, about Mrs. Hamilton’s fan, or Miss Fanny’s shawl, that Bryanstone and Honoria were again alone for some three or four minutes, outside the door. Miss Forrester utilised them thus. She had worn a single half-blown tea-rose as her sole

ornament that evening, and as Bryanstone stood, perfectly silent, for the others to come, she suddenly took it from her dress, and held it up to him.

“Will you take it, if I ask you?” she cried, eagerly. “For an hour, for five minutes, will you keep something that has been mine? There,” and she put it hurriedly in his button-hole. “Will you wear it? Will you let Lumley see you with it—yes, or no?”

To say that Bryanstone was unmoved, would be to say that he was a man without any of a man’s common weakness or common passion. He was moved greatly; but not to the extent of forgetting for an instant what he was about.

“I am glad to possess any mark of your favour, Miss Forrester; but as to rivalling Lumley, it is out of my ambition. You have made me feel that already. Lumley is going to marry you.”

“Marry!” she repeated, almost wildly. “Marry! and what do I care for that? Wear my rose an hour, a minute, and I care more for

it than if any duke in England offered me marriage."

She turned to him beseechingly, and the wind blew a little tress of her perfumed silky hair across Bryanstone's face. How the rest happened he never knew; but in another instant, with or without his own design, their lips met.

"I have resolved," she murmured. "I will not marry him. And from you—I hope nothing! Good-by."

Her hand clung passionately to his for a moment; then she got into the carriage, and in another minute Mrs. Hamilton and Fanny came out, and she was gone.

"Come in, Henry," cried out Richard, with the joyousness that always entered his voice as soon as the women of any party had departed. "I should propose lansquenet and tobacco, for a change, as soon as you've done gazing after those young women's carriage."

They played till long after day-break; and Bryanstone, who was in extreme spirits, and, contrary to his custom, drinking tumbler after tumbler of champagne, won everything.

Farnham Lumley never could bear to lose his money; and as he stood shaking Bryanstone's hand, and between two and three hundred pounds to the bad, his cadaverous face looked deathlier than usual, in the wan green light of the early morning.

"You win both ways," he said, and glanced with his evil sneer at the faded flower on the other's breast. "Cards and love too. It's devilish hard lines for us, who lose at everything."

When the dark clouds had, long afterwards, gathered round Bryanstone's life, more than one man who was present remembered the expression of Farnham Lumley's face as he spoke those words.

END OF PART IV.



## PART V.





## CHAPTER XIII.

NELLY.

THE last light of an August sunset is resting, warm and full, upon the solitary parsonage-house of Lowick-on-the-Wold. Lowick-on-the-Wold is one of the least civilised parishes in Norfolk; the dwelling of its spiritual guide one of the most hopelessly dreary that ever entered into the heart of man to build. A low, small-windowed house of black granite, girt in on all sides save the south by barren waste-land, and with only a homely strip of garden dividing it in front from the stony unfrequented road that is euphonized by Lowick-on-the-Wold into the name of the village High Street.

At the present moment, however, the little parsonage is looking its brightest; looking, as it does, on about a dozen exceptional occasions,

perhaps, out of all the three hundred and sixty-five days of cold and wet and greyness that make up an ordinary Eastern Counties English year. A tender, violet-red hovers, rosy and trembling, athwart the whole grand stretch of lonely moor. The air is still ; so still, that you can hear the mile-away sougning of the sea upon the sand-ridged shore. The smell from pinks and honey-suckles in the parsonage garden mingles with the fruity sweetness of the moorland gorse. The grasshoppers chirrup with as loud a joy as though their life were to last out an Italian, not a Norfolk, summer. So much for the *mise en scène*. Now for the human element that gives it interest.

A plain country girl and a London man of the world are walking slowly, the girl's hand on her companion's arm, along one of the garden paths; and from her eager upturned face and rapt attention while he discourses, you perceive at once what old story is being repeated here ; perceive also that on one side alone is the rehearsal genuine, or likely ever to become so.

Can you wonder at this? Look at the girl

more closely ; divest her of the false grace which youth and the fading light may possibly at this moment lend her ; look at her closely, and say if any man accustomed to, and proof against, the handsomest women in London, could be in danger of losing his head about such a face as this ?

It is a face all a-glow with expression ; a face with intellect, with love in it ; a face that could not lie. Let me record first the solitary beauty Nelly Bertram possessed, and then—to plain facts. The complexion is sallow ; the eyes quite commonplace hazel eyes ; the features irregular and large. One or two redeeming points are to be discovered in her as in every normally-developed human creature. The girl has average bright-brown hair ; snow-white, though not perfectly even, teeth ; and delicate little fragile-fingered hands. She is not ugly. A man of a certain disposition might marry her, and at the end of six months find her better in his sight than all the beautiful women in the world. But she is decidedly, irredeemably plain. All the most intoxicating draughts of young women's

lives, all pleasures derived from personal vanity, from ball-room triumphs over others, are, and must ever be, forbidden nectar to her. And she knows it, and laughs—she is quite a child, remember—to think that it is so. Plain as Nelly Bertram is, she believes that she has found her heaven already, and would not change places with the most seductive empress, the fairest prince's wife in Europe.

Her heaven is the hope that she has won Henry Bryanstone's heart. She knows nothing either of his excellence as a parti, or of his non-likelihood of marrying. Knows nothing of his first dead mistress, or of the dangerous last love into whose toils he so nearly fell only three months ago in London. All she does know is that he seems (did he not ever after seem so to her?) a great deal more than mortal. That his face, his manner, his London-cut clothes, the very atmosphere he some way brings with him into her uncle's poor household, all appear like emanations from another sphere to her, poor little Nelly Bertram, who never spoke in her life to any young or handsome man above

the grade of a farmer's son before ! I don't know whether the girl would have fallen down and worshipped in the same unquestioning way if the fine exterior had been all ; if her idol had chanced, as very handsome men in very well-cut coats often do chance, to have neither brain nor soul in addition to his outward endowments. However that may be, and long, certainly, before Miss Bertram could know anything whatsoever of Bryanstone save that he possessed a handsome face and well-toned voice, she loved him, and was satisfied. And this love of hers was too intensely unconscious, too simply the eager outburst of feeling long unnaturally pent in, for any of the artificial miseries of common artificial sentiment to have mingled in it as yet. Mr. Bryanstone was there ; Mr. Bryanstone was to stay another fortnight in her uncle's parish ; had said that he should come over two or three times a-week at least to the parsonage as long as he remained. Nelly wanted no more. She neither hoped nor feared. She loved—with as much earnestness, as much passionate fervour, as it was in her strong, untutored, childish heart to give.

Kindly reader, whose outraged sense cries out aloud against Miss Bertram's forwardness, let me tell you more plainly how this girl was placed. Not to be forward at seventeen, a young woman must, you are aware, have been trained. The idea may not be pleasing; but it is true. Any girl who has been brought up utterly without artificial or female training will be, at the age of seventeen, what we of the world term forward; something of the unconsciousness of shame which clothes a little child in so fair a garb lingering about her still, and hindering her from concealing up to the standard mask of conventional bashfulness. Nelly Bertram had been brought up, not only without a woman's training, but without any training at all. Before she was six years old, both her parents died, and from that time till the present she had lived in the house of her uncle, Frank Bertram, the vicar of Lowick.

Such a life of loneliness was probably never led by mortal child before. Neighbours they had none, save Sir Harry and Miss Surtees, of The Place; great county people who spoke two


or three words to Nelly in church (also to the Sunday-school children) every Christmas and Easter. Companions she had none ; amusements she had none. The Rev. Frank Bertram was a bachelor, and hated women ; so, not even the farmers' wives and daughters ever crossed the vicarage door. All the year round he breakfasted at nine, dined at three, supped at eight. After breakfast Nelly studied with him for two hours regularly : and they were not bad sort of studies on the whole ; dry, and bearing no possible reference to anything a young woman could need to know about while she lived, but better than what girls are generally put through, inasmuch as they taught her how to reason, and how to be patient and silent. The three middle hours of the day were entirely her own ; and these she spent out of doors, in all seasons of the year, and in all weathers. Then came dinner, after which Mr. Bertram invariably shut up the windows and door of his very small sitting-room, drew down the blinds, threw a huge silk pocket-handkerchief over his head, and slept.



Under the influence of one of those eccentricities to which old persons are not unfrequently subject, it was his will that his niece should remain in the room while he slept. Although he was excessively deaf at all other times, he averred that the slightest noise always awoke him from his after-dinner nap. Consequently, an hour and a-half out of every day Miss Bertram had to spend without speaking or moving ; during the winter months without reading ; and in an atmosphere that nearly stifled her. After tea, in fine weather, they walked abroad. But as Mr. Bertram's pace was slow, and his speech didactic in the extreme, the girl never felt that she enjoyed even her summer evenings on the moors. In winter, their nights were occupied till ten o'clock by backgammon, cribbage, or double dummy ; then came prayers, all of the eighteenth century school of divinity ; and then bed.

This was the life Miss Bertram had led, unchequered by any extraneous excitement whatever, save her confirmation, from the time she was six years old until the day she first met

Henry Bryanstone. He came on a visit to the Surtees, was introduced to Mr. and Miss Bertram on the occasion of one of their half-yearly calls at the The Place, walked half of the way home with them, and called the [next day at the Parsonage, and the next. In a week he had made kindly little unmeaning speeches to Miss Bertram by the score, and in return she looked up to him and loved him, as only a child who has never known what love is in its life before, can love. So much of the state of the poor little girl's heart, and of her exceeding ignorance, it is needful openly to confess. In justice to Bryanstone, I must also say that he had never, up to this evening certainly, dreamt of the parson's niece caring for him otherwise than as a child cares. From the first moment he saw her, he felt the interest in her which any perfectly thorough nature, either in man or woman, never failed to inspire him with. Partridge-shooting had not begun. There was no one he cared about at The Place. Nelly Bertram, in her simplicity and straightforwardness, amused him; and the walk to her uncle's house across the



moor gave him an appetite for his dinner—always a great source of interest to men in a country house when there are no field sports on hand. Of the passion of love, or of any feeling howsoever remote to it for Nelly herself, he felt no more than he would have done for Lilian or Polly Fairfax, when he used to take them to the play, and amuse himself over their criticisms on the performance.

“And you decidedly refuse to come to-morrow, Miss Nelly? No argument that I could bring forward would change you in your decision?”

They had left the garden now, and were standing together upon the common, watching the pale white moon as she rose upon the cloudless expanse of that still crimson summer sky. Nelly’s hand was on Henry Bryanstone’s arm yet, and he held it in his own as it lay there; and the girl, being ignorant that such an action was morally wrong, from a man who has not yet spoken of marriage, suffered things to take their natural course without a struggle.

“I don’t think I should enjoy it if I went,

Mr. Bryanstone. I don't understand archery, and the only white dress I have isn't ironed; and, besides, none of these grand ladies know us, and if I did go, there would be no one to take any notice of me."

"Don't you think I should?"

"I don't know, sir. It's very different noticing me here, where there's no one else, to what it would be at a grand archery fête at 'The Place,' where you would have a dozen or more beautiful young women, all ready to take you away from me."

Henry Bryanstone laughed; something in the simple jealousy of this speech could not but please him. "A dozen beautiful young women to take me away from you? I must say I should like to be told who they are. Not either of the Ladies Clinton, earl's daughters though they are, nor Miss Surtees herself, nor Gracie Haigh, nor —nor —" but Bryanstone hesitated.

"You have not enumerated all yet. What of the new beauty who you told me arrived last night?"


"Miss Forrester!" he answered carelessly.

“ Oh, well, she is handsome, undoubtedly ; and being half a French woman gives her such a different style in dress and manner to the women she’s among now. But Miss Forrester and I know each other already : the time of danger is past.”

Nelly had spoken of no danger ; and in mentioning Miss Forrester’s name a quarter of an hour before, Bryanstone had not said that he even knew her till she came to Norfolk. Involuntarily a chill crossed the girl’s heart, the first foreboding chill of all the bitter jealousy she was hereafter to know, and she made an excuse to take her hand away from his arm.

“ You have known Miss Forrester before ? Has she been very much admired ? Does every one—I mean, do you—think her perfectly beautiful ? ”

Bryanstone laughed. “ Perfectly beautiful ? No, certainly not. Miss Forrester is a very handsome woman, and knows how to make the most of herself. She ought ; she has had a good many years to practise in. Her best point is



her hair, perhaps—hair and complexion—but really, I don't think I care enough about such things to remark them closely. All the women I've ever been fond of have been plain, Nelly."

When men say that to a woman who is not handsome, do they imagine themselves to be saying something at once generous and softly flattering to herself? Miss Bertram winced under his words with a positive bodily pain. "The women he had been fond of"—his sisters, his godmother, no doubt; and he classed her with them, and tried to soothe her vanity by depreciating beauty in others. For young though she was, don't think Miss Bertram was so devoid of all the natural instinct of her sex, as to believe one word Henry Bryanstone said in the matter of Miss Forrester's charms.

"Plain people have their uses, no doubt," in a little constrained tone this; "but their place is not at archery fêtes. I hope you will have a fine day to-morrow; the clear way the moon rises promises well."

Bryanstone turned and looked down into her

face ; if he saw no very happy expression there, could she help it ? She was not happy. In the last five short minutes the serpent had stolen into her paradise ; the glory had gone from her dream. She doubted, feared, envied, was a child no longer. For the world she could not have put her hand on Bryanstone's arm and let him hold it there, as he had done, unquestioned, a quarter of an hour before. As he looked down upon her face she blushed guiltily, and for the first time since she had known him avoided meeting his eyes.


“ You foolish little girl ! Do you really dread failure so much ? I thought only women who had conquered and been defeated knew anything about these things. Don't be such a child—for you can't mean what you say. Get your white frock ironed, and put on your best sash, and come to ‘ The Place ’ to-morrow. Why, I'll promise, if you like, never to leave you for one minute the whole day.”

Miss Bertram refused, hesitated, promised, on the express condition that Bryanstone would let her take her chance, and not victimise himself in

any way. And then she remembered suddenly that it was getting late, and that she must go home.

At the little wicket-gate that opened from the back garden upon the common, Mr. Bertram met them. The hobby, the solitary amusement of the old man's life, was insect-catching; and he was radiant, flushed with success, at the present moment.

"A *Saturnia Pavonia* Major, a female *Saturnia Pavonia*," he cried, speaking very loud, as deaf people do, in his excitement, and flourishing his huge green gauze flapper about Bryanstone's head. "I've been looking for her for seven years, sir. I've waited for her for hours upon the moor, with my nets and my lanthorn, in vain; and now, to-night, a fortnight later than she generally appears, I've caught the finest specimen you ever set your eyes upon. You'll come in and see her, sir, of course? That's right, and I'll show you the *Miselia Aprilina* I took last spring, and one or two extraordinarily fine specimens of *Sphingidæ*, while Nelly looks after our supper."





Bryanstone had never been in the little parsonage at meal-time before. Nothing, indeed, but the unprecedented excitement of the *Saturnia Pavonia* would have induced Mr. Bertram to invite him, or any other guest, to his table; and for the first time in her life Nelly felt, as she helped to lay the supper, how small their parlour was, how humble the fare, how homely the attendance. But any such small shame was dispelled the instant that Bryanstone came in from the garden with her uncle. He was interested, but not to a point at which even Nelly could detect the faintest shade of acting, in the *Saturnia*. He knew nothing whatever about natural history; but for a man living in the country, as would some day be his lot, pursuits of this kind were an actual necessity. He endeared himself to the old woman-servant's heart for ever by praising the salad; he made Mr. Bertram hear every word he said without shouting at him—a thing Uncle Frank detested. He ate with the hearty goodwill that very well-bred people can assume, as they can assume everything else (even hunger, an hour and a-half after

a seven o'clock dinner), and which is so specially gratifying to people who offer humble fare at wild and barbarous hours, as the Bertrams were doing.

"A promising young man—a very promising young man, that," said Uncle Frank, when Bryanstone had left. "He's going to send me one of these new illustrated catalogues when he returns to town, and 'twill be a nice employment for you, Nell, to cut out the labels. An intelligent, well-mannered young man. He seemed greatly interested by the information it was in my power to give him about the habits of the different insects in this locality."

In the majority of works of imagination it is the custom for old people to envy the thoughtlessness of the young. In reality, young people, if they think at all, must be forced, amidst the bitter vital suffering of their life, to envy the perfect egotism, the happy animal contentedness, of the old. Young as Nelly Bertram was, she felt strongly at this moment that her uncle—with his quill and little bottle of cyanide of potassium, stabbing obstinately healthy or obese

moths, and watching with intense interest some quivering delicate lace-flies he had already crucified on bits of cork—was happier far than she was. His toys could not be taken from him. With camphor and watchfulness he could defy even time itself, while for her ——

For her—in spite of all Bryanstone's pretty speeches, of the kindly pressure of his hand, of his attentions to her uncle, of his promises to walk over and meet her to-morrow,—in spite of all this, Nelly's heart was sinking within her. Some sounds from the great battles we must all fight had, for the first time, reached her ears; and she felt how weak, how lonely, how poorly-armed she was to enter upon the encounter.

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